

THE amazon STRIKES AGAIN

By John Russell Fearn

NEVER BEFORE PUBLISHED IN BOOK OR ANY OTHER FORM

IT came without warning from the midst of a winter's afternoon in 1986—a sudden gathering of clouds, the dimming of a red sun before their deepening fury, and in their wake like the trailing of a giant's garments came the smashing roar of a vast wind.

It was the sixth, and by far the worst, storm. Violent lightning and cannonading thunder accompanied it. For 60 terrible minutes it raged over London and then melted again as mysteriously as it had come. The winter sun gleamed forth again on rivers where roads had lain, upon buildings splintered with the impact of lightning bolts, upon uprooted trees, and in some cases dead people in the midst of jammed traffic.

New York, Moscow, Melbourne, Paris, Ottawa, and now London. Every one of these cities had experienced these mystical climatic onslaughts and found themselves in semi-ruins.

The air-line executives were gnashing their teeth at the disruption in their schedules and the loss of life entailed by airplanes which had been struck by lightning. The Dodd Space Line, that mighty organization which controlled travel between Earth and Venus, was the most troubled of all. Caught in such storms as these, the space machines which relied primarily on electrical instruments for guidance, had crashed by the dozens. Receipts were falling. The usual flow of people to make the business or pleasure trip to torrid Venus was fast declining.

In all the observatories and laboratories of the world the track of the storms and their precise nature was being studied. It was up to science to explain why mighty storms appeared in places where such unparalleled fury had never broken forth before, why they concentrated particularly on important cities, and why they melted so completely—as though a switch had been thrown—when their ultimate in damage had been accomplished.

The scientists, however, were hampered. There was never any warning as to when a storm would arrive—or where, and when it did appear it was so cataclysmic in violence that there was no opportunity to study it since all electrical instruments were thrown off balance.

Dr. Harvey Shaw, curator-in-chief of the London Observatories, summed up for the scientists in a none too optimistic speech. He blamed the trouble on unusual sunspot activity.

Clement Anderson, commander of Dodd Space Liner 87, on the Venus-Earth trip, took up a stand before the multiplex outlook window of the bridge and stared at the Earth as it rose from the depths of the void. The liner was 30 minutes away from the London space port, its vast journey nearly over.

"What do you make of that, Mason?" Anderson asked.

Anderson was a short, powerful man with a habit of locking his hands behind him and keeping his feet a little apart when he surveyed. He stood thus at the moment, his powerful face directed toward the world of his birth. First Mate Mason came over to him from the charting bench.

"What, sir?" Then as he looked through the window he saw it, too—an almost incredible display of brilliance around the Earth's South Pole, a nebulous veil of white, yellow, and then muddy brown. It encompassed a gigantic arc, shimmering enigmatically with an unholy lustre.

"Queer, eh?" Anderson muttered, and his sharp blue eyes glanced at the first mate's face.

"Looks to me like the aurora, sir," Mason responded.

"Did you ever see the aurora that size?"

"Come to think of it, no—nor that shape. It looks more like a core of expanding energy or something. But how can it be, sir? In Antarctica? Only human beings could create ex-

STAR WEEKLY COMPLETE NOVEL
TORONTO, SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 21, 1948

panding energy, and that continent isn't inhabited."

Anderson turned as the chief navigator came over to him.

"Trouble ahead, sir," the navigator said. "Just got the news. There's one of those terrific storms raging over London. We're not likely to get through it."

Anderson's eyes narrowed. "Storm or no storm, our schedules are made to be kept—and they will be. We'll get through. I'll take over."

He moved to his post on the bridge, and stood staring into the darkening, lashing tumult ahead. It was centred like a pool of ink over the spot where London was situated on the tiny relief map view of Britain far below. Elsewhere on Earth it seemed the skies were peaceful.

Anderson only spoke when he had to give orders. He had the safety of the machine and 500 souls to think for—and presently he found his spacemanship tested to the uttermost.

The moment the great space liner struck the black area in which the storm raged, every instrument vital to the navigation of the vessel went haywire. The 400-foot-long craft which had braved all the dangers of the void was now in the thick of stealing lightning bolts and overpowering streams of magnetic energy which sent dangerous thrills through the bodies of those within the vessel.

"Keep away from the walls!" Anderson roared as the machine dipped and dived.

He switched the useless radio, tugged at the reader-meters, all without avail. The liner was lost—twisting, turning, crashing through an endless hail of electrical bolts.

Commander Anderson never knew how he escaped the wreck of the space liner, chiefly because he was the only survivor of all the passengers and crew. The liner crashed into the heart of London at the height of the storm and it was six weeks later before Anderson left hospital, minus an arm and an eye and with burn marks across his face which he would carry to the grave.

Throughout the time he had been in hospital, he had been possessed by one thought, clear and vivid—the thought of that weird aurora glowing from the South Pole. He had to tell somebody about it, and the best person seemed to be Chris Wilson, executive chief of the Dodd Space Line.

Chris Wilson was in his office when the commander was shown in. The office had suntrap windows which overlooked the sprawling immensity of 1986 London, or at least those parts of it which remained following the onslaught of several more gigantic storms. So far, this element-proof building owned by the Dodd organization had escaped disaster, its electrical-diffusion system being so perfectly planned that all the lightning on earth was powerless even to scratch it.

"Good-morning, commander," Chris Wilson, gray-haired, erect, with sombre lights in his blue eyes, got up from the desk and grasped the commander's solitary hand. "I'm glad to see that you're about again."

"What's left of me," Anderson replied, seating himself and smiling grimly. "I'm finished as far as space is concerned—that's evident."

Chris Wilson said: "I've made arrangements for your pension to be granted forthwith, Anderson, with additional bonus for injuries received."

"And you always shoot straight, sir, Anderson said. "I've been out of touch with the world for the past six weeks. What's been happening?"

"The worst, I'm afraid." Wilson looked troubled. "Storms—storms—and more storms, nearly always centring on a capital city. Radio is utterly disrupted; television is a mass of bogged-up interference. Airplanes are more or less grounded. As for our space line, the usual flood of passengers has dropped to a trickle."

"I never saw anything before like a certain aurora round the South Pole," Anderson said.

CHAPTER II

CHRIS looked at him in surprise. "Aurora? What aurora?"

"I saw it as we came in from Venus just before the crash." Anderson explained the incident with a wealth of detail. "Only it didn't look like an aurora—not the real thing," he finished, musing. "It was more like a core of electrical energy, as my first mate put it. I can see there ought to be a connection between that weird aurora and the frightful storm which struck London almost simultaneously and crashed my ship."

Chris pondered for a while. "And a connection, no doubt, between the aurora and all other storms which have occurred. This is definitely interesting, commander. So far nobody has ever referred to an Antarctic aurora."

"Perhaps because nobody's ever seen it. I doubt if you could unless it was from space or very near the Antarctic Circle. I'm convinced there's something mysterious there."

Chris Wilson got up and paced about the office for a moment or two. Then he turned and looked at the commander.

"I'll put two of my best men on the job right away. They can take a flier over the Antarctic and see if there is anything interesting going on there."

Anderson said: "I think you've got a much better card in your hand. What about Miss Brant?"

"I hesitate to disturb her. She's out of town at her laboratory engaged in something called 'electronic transportation.' But if the worst comes to the worst, I'll contact her."

After Anderson had left the office Chris Wilson stood and pondered for a moment or two, then he lifted the desk phone.

"Get me Alton and Baines," he instructed. "Send a call to the briefing room. I want them immediately—in my office."

"Yes, sir."

Soon the two men came in, both of them big fliers in the early 20's. Wilson motioned them to chairs.

"I've an assignment for you two boys," he announced. "I'm not entirely sure, but it's possible that from your discoveries you may turn yourselves into world benefactors."

"Doing what, sir?" asked Baines.

Wilson explained everything Commander Anderson had told him. The two men listened without interrupting.

"It certainly seems as though there might be a connection between this energy aura, as the commander calls it, and the storms," Baines agreed finally. "If there is, we'll find it."

"On no account," Chris instructed, "are you to descend to investigate should you discover anything unusual. Take a movie of everything and bring it back. I was going to say you could televise everything to me, but with television in its present warped condition that would hardly be practicable. So a movie will have to suffice. Also keep in touch by short wave beam radio, which seems to resist the electrical interference better than anything, and give me hourly reports on your progress."

Both men nodded and got to their feet.

"We'll be off in 30 minutes," Baines promised. "In a B-7 jet we'll do the round trip to Antarctica in about 14 hours. If there are any secrets out there they won't be secrets for long! Rely on it."

At noon the two pilots left the London airport in their small, instrument-laden flier which was capable of reaching a top velocity of 1,000 miles an hour, the gyroscopically-balanced cabin preventing any untoward effects upon the machine's occupants.

For their route, Baines and Alton took a straight line across the Mediterranean and the Red Sea, so across the north-eastern tip of Africa and then over Madagascar. After this they hurtled onwards across the Southern ocean, coming ever nearer to that mystic continent where at this time of year the night was six months long. Already, for the two fliers, the daylight was commencing to fade.

At 6.30 p.m. by Greenwich time they were flying a mile above the endless starlit white wildernesses of the Antarctic, and Baines turned to the short-wave radio to make his usual hourly communication to the London base. In his office Chris Wilson sat waiting intently before the speaker, every word presently coming to him with flawless clearness, relayed from the immense radio rooms in the base of the Dodd building. As it happened, the air seemed to be freer of static than it had been for many a month.

"So far nothing to report," Baines' voice intoned, after he had given his latitude and longitude. "No sign of life. Only ice and night. Sky clear. Seems to be a mountain range ahead, or else a volcanic one." There was a pause. "Yes, a volcanic one. According to my map, it's the one which contains Mount Erebus. Can see Mount Erebus now dominating the range. Shall proceed over range to investigate. Communication ends for a while."

Chris Wilson glanced up at the scientists who had assembled round the desk and were also listening. He had summoned them here specially, since if the two pilots did discover anything it would probably shift responsibility into the scientific field.

"Climbing over mountain range," Baines' voice resumed. "A very great height but I think we'll make it. Still climbing." Long pause. "Still climbing."

Longer pause. "I sure wouldn't like to crash in this range! About the biggest I've seen and I've dealt with a few in my time. Quite a few active craters, too. Must be quite warm around here even if it is a frozen waste everywhere else . . ."

There was an interval of about three minutes, then: "Have reached summit of range and we are now crossing it. Our searchlights are on, but there doesn't appear to be any sign of life of any kind. Only snow, glaciers, and mountain peaks and chasms. The range seems to be unusually wide. No end to it yet and we're moving at 500 an hour. Must report big temperature variations. Before we reached the range the exterior temperature registered 32 degrees of frost. At its lower reaches it registered only five degrees of frost, and now it's steady at 20. The air is remarkably variable . . ."

There was a long pause, then: "End of range is in sight. Have crossed it and—"

The aviator's voice stopped dead on a rising note of amazement. Chris Wilson and the scientists leaned forward intently toward the loudspeaker, their faces strained with attention.

"There seems to be some kind of valley down below," Baines' voice hurried on. "It's lighted! Thousands of lights! They look to be buildings. There are four huge metal towers. They're sending out brilliant sparks. I never saw anything like it— Say the instruments aren't working! We're losing height! I can't get the machine under—"

There was a sharp click from the speaker and then silence. Chris muttered something and snatched up the phone connecting him with the radio rooms.

"What's happened?" he demanded. "Get Baines back on the beam immediately. It's desperately urgent."

"The fault's at his end, sir," the engineer replied. "We're doing all we can to contact him."

Chris stared fixedly at the loudspeaker, the scientists around him breathing hard, but beyond a faint crackling and hissing no sounds came from the pilots nearly 7,000 miles away. Finally it was the voice of the radio engineer which was heard instead.

"Can't get him, Mr. Wilson. No reply at all."

Chris switched off, and looked at the scientists.

"I don't like saying it," one of them commented, "but it sounds to me as though they've flown into some kind of concealed danger area. Their instruments and radio are cut off and—"

"Their plane has crashed, and them with it," Chris snapped. "There is something in Antarctica that is more likely to explain the disastrous storms than all the sunspots in creation. But I don't intend to risk any more valuable lives in an effort to find out what it means. And I'm afraid you won't be able to help me, gentlemen."

"Perhaps," said Dr. Harvey Shaw, "Miss Brant might be able to help. With her scientific wizardry—"

"I intend to get in touch with her right away. Thank you for coming anyway, gentlemen, and don't waste any further time studying sunspots."

Very much chastened, the group turned and filed out of the office. Chris Wilson tightened his mouth and picked up the visiphone.

"Get me Miss Brant," he ordered. "She should be at her home; if she isn't, try the Physical Laboratory."

There was a pause before the switch-girl answered, her face appearing on the scanning plate of the instrument.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Wilson, but she isn't at either place. Her home reports that she has gone uptown for the evening."

"Then try every night spot you can find, and have the police send out a general call for her. I must see her on a matter of exceptional urgency."

"I'll attend to it right away, sir."

CHAPTER III

FOR several minutes a wealthy young man, seated in the grill room of the Metz, had been studying two women at the next-but-one table. Besides him a big man smoked a cigar and watched the scrutiny in some amusement.

"Wonderful!" the young man declared at last. "I don't think I ever saw such a lovely woman!"

"Do you mean the blonde or the dark-headed one?" his companion inquired.

"As if there could be any doubt!" the young man exclaimed. "The blonde, of course. The dark one is good looking in a different kind of way, but her companion—!" Words failed him and he shook his head. "Who is she?"

The big man—J. T. Frantham, owner of a chain of newspapers and several television hookups—smiled.

"That," he said, "is Miss Violet Ray Brant."

"You mean the Golden Amazon?" the young man ejaculated, startled.

"The same. You've seen her photographs, surely? Or on the telescreens?"

"Yes, but she looks so young, so much more beautiful than I had ever imagined."

The young man's eyes went back to her again. The evening gown she was wearing disclosed her neck and shoulders in all their graceful curves, and the curious amber tint of her skin, a tint which gave the firm, strong mouth a cherry redness by comparison. Finely arched black brows moved expressively over violet eyes as she talked to her companion. Her breadth of forehead was even more emphasized by the golden hair swept back from it and held in place by a jewelled band clasped over the crown of her head.

"You wouldn't think that that woman is over 60, would you?" the newspaper owner murmured. "Yet she must be."

"I suppose . . ." The young man swallowed hard. "I suppose that's right. I'd put her at 23—no more."

"When I was a young man she looked just as she looks now," J. T. Frantham commented. "Only not as beautiful. She seems to get more magnificent as she grows older. If she does grow older. Let's just say—as time passes. We have a lot to thank her for. All civilization has."

"Yes, I know." The young man was talking absently. "She started the Dodd Space Line, didn't she, and gave us lots of inventions besides? And didn't she destroy a menace from Venus recently—something to do with a chameleon man?"

"Correct. That was two years ago. She's the outcome of scientific mother and a scientist's experiment. The result is scientific brilliance in excelsis."

"It's all nonsense, though, about her having the strength of 10 men, isn't it? I mean—no woman could."

J. T. smiled. "This woman has. As a baby she was experimented upon by a surgeon and her gland structure or something was completely altered. It caused her to grow up with superhuman strength, possessing at the same time the brain of a genius, looks well beyond the average, and— Tell you what, I'll show you. She's a very old friend of mine. Come along."

Frantham got up and went across to the table where Violet Ray Brant and the dark-haired girl were seated. Both women glanced up and smiled.

"Why, Mr. Frantham, how are you?" the Amazon smiled, as he shook hands. "Been quite a time since I've seen you. You have met my niece, Ethel Wilson?"

"Daughter of Chris, head of the Dodd Line?" J. T. nodded. "Of course I have many a time—How are you, Miss Wilson? May I introduce Mr. Balton? He's the son of a friend of mine and just on his way through London. As a matter of fact he's quite overwhelmed by your beauty, Miss Brant."

"Really?" Unfathomable purple eyes fixed on the young man in some amusement. "I'm sure I'm very flattered. And I'm so glad to know you, Mr. Balton."

The golden fingers gripped his hand and slid away again gently.

"He is doubtful if you, or any woman, can have superhuman strength, Miss Brant," J. T. remarked, winking at her. "I feel that he ought to be convinced, don't you?"

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"Anything to preserve my reputation," the Amazon agreed, and she took the solid tungsten two-shilling piece which J. T. handed her. She made a sudden effort and bent the coin double between her fingers.

"You know," she said, dropping the folded coin in the young man's palm, "that's a trick I love doing. Keeps me in practice. You keep it, as a souvenir. I'm sure J. T. won't miss two shillings."

The young man tried in vain to straighten out the tough metal.

"Then it's true!" he declared finally, staring at the Amazon.

"I'm afraid it is," she admitted. "You see, I—Yes?" She glanced up as a messenger leaned toward her deferentially.

"You are wanted urgently, Miss Brant, at the Dodd Line headquarters. Mr. Wilson wishes to see you on a matter of vital importance right away."

"Thank you."

The Amazon frowned in some puzzlement, then got to her feet, and J. T. placed her cape about her shoulders.

"This is too bad," he complained. "I was hoping we could have had a chat—"

"Some other time," the Amazon said, and bidding both men good-night she went across the crowded room with the walk of an empress, Ethel Wilson following quietly in the rear. They were in the luxurious depths of the Amazon's private car, an emotionless chauffeur at the controls behind the front partition, before Ethel stirred herself to speak.

"There are times, Aunt Vi, when I suspect you of becoming almost human," she said.

"Then it is a suspicion which you can discount," the Amazon replied, after thinking for a moment. "It is simply that I have culture enough to realize that I can hardly behave as an atrocious bore when in the midst of society. . . . Besides, there are times when I like to be among people and forget science for a while—such as tonight. You're my great companion, Rosy Cheeks"—it struck Ethel as odd how the childhood name still clung to her—"and you've broadened my horizon quite a lot. After all we went through on Venus together two years ago I've realized that there are few people whose company I enjoy as much as yours."

"From you, Aunt Vi, that's a terrific compliment," Ethel said, smiling with eyes as frankly blue as her father's. "From a person like you, who is a law unto herself, it—"

"I wonder," the Amazon interrupted, still thinking, "what your father can want? It is extremely urgent, he says."

"Perhaps somebody has found a way to colonize Mars," Ethel suggested dryly. "Muscled in ahead of us."

"Hardly likely. That's my exclusive problem and it will be at least another year before I've completed the plans for the first Martian expedition. . . . Well, we'll soon be knowing."

CHAPTER IV

THEY reached the Dodd Building in 10 minutes and took the elevator to the top floor. Chris Wilson got up quickly from his chair as the two women came in. He looked at his daughter in surprise.

"I hope you're wanting Aunt Vi for something really important, dad," Ethel said. "We were having a perfectly lovely time at the Metz—supper and everything. Then your message came and ruined everything."

"So you spend your time with your aunt instead of with a young man, eh?" Chris Wilson asked.

"She has something of my aversion to men, Chris," the Amazon remarked. "We often spend an evening together, exchanging confidences. But what's troubling you?"

"Violent storms, the South Pole, and an apparently inhabited land in Antarctica where there seem to be tall towers that send off sparks."

"Are you suggesting that the violent storms we've been having are linked with the Antarctic?" the Amazon asked.

"I am."

"I've wondered about them," the girl admitted. "Only I've been so busy working on my electronic transportation theory I didn't pay much attention. . . . Well, what's the story?"

Chris gave it to her in detail and she sat listening with her eyes fixed on him with that hypnotic expression she adopted when concentrating. When the story was over she said:

"Why didn't you tell me sooner that your fortunes had deteriorated so much? Am I the chief scientist of the Dodd Line or not?"

"Of course, but you were so absorbed in your experiment—"

"I am never too busy to protect the space line which I helped to bring into being. Surely the fact that I cleaned up Venus and made it safe for colonists was proof of that. As for this Antarctica business, it's absorbing—interesting. First Commander Anderson saw something resembling an energy-aura, then these two pilots of yours saw a populated land, tall towers emitting sparks, and—then became silent!"

"Possibly they are dead—or captives," Chris said. "And I don't feel too happy at having sent them into it. What I cannot understand is why anybody should want to create electrical storms—if they are created."

"Since they have almost destroyed your space-line trade, have grounded aircraft, and all but ruined radio and television—to say nothing of shattering many cities—I am of opinion that the aim is industrial paralysis," the Amazon decided, getting to her feet. "I never realized things had gone so far. Come to my laboratory and we'll see what we can do; my car's outside."

Fifteen minutes later the Amazon's out-of-town house had been reached. It was not over-large, but flawlessly kept and tastefully furnished. Violet Ray Brant's almost sexless nature made her interest in feminine trifles negligible; instead her love was centred on the huge, magnificently equipped laboratory annexed to the house and into which she led the way.

Though both Chris Wilson and his daughter had seen it on many occasions, they again had that awestruck feeling as they looked about them on shining instruments, creations of the girl's fertile brain, creations which the world's cleverest engineers had found completely baffling.

"I think," the Amazon said, looking about her, "that the best thing we can do is take a look at this spot in Antarctica for ourselves. From here I mean—in safety. By means of the x-ray telescope."

"Good idea," Chris agreed, though he seemed rather vague.

"It's not a new instrument," the Amazon reminded him. "I've used it before—only it was a smaller model then. It sends out an x-ray beam with a maximum range of 10,000 miles. Because it is a beam in the ultra-short frequency it penetrates solid matter, so there's no need to worry about horizon curvature. Once the right location is obtained, adjustment of the focusing apparatus causes light-wave photons to be carried back along the x-ray carrier-beam; then they are transformed into the original picture which has been picked up—as in television. The only trouble is that pictures at a distance appear to be falling backward, due to the angle at which they are seen. However . . . What was the last longitude-latitude position of those two pilots, Chris?"

Chris gave it to her and she set to work with an instrument like a super-typewriter, a mathematical machine which through the medium of ciphers and symbols gave her the necessary position for the guiding control of the x-ray telescope. With the card of figures in her hand she settled in a chair bolted to a keyboard of plugs and switches. Her nimble fingers began to play over them, setting the course of the beam, then she switched on the power and a steady musical hum pervaded the laboratory from concealed dynamos.

Chris, standing beside his daughter, was passingly amused at the incongruity of the scene. This magnificent golden-haired girl in the costly evening gown seated in the midst of complicated machinery, her whole being concentrated on her task. If anything were needed to convince him of the Golden Amazon's fantastic nature, this did it.

After a moment she turned. "Whatever there is at that particular latitude-longitude point will presently be visible," she announced. "On the screen above us . . ." And she nodded to a glass square perched on a frame above the instrument.

She snapped a switch and the screen glowed, but all that was visible upon it was a series of black bars, forming and dissolving with absolutely no trace of a visible image. She stared at it in annoyance, then wonder, and checked her instruments again. Finally, her mouth hardening with inner fury, she switched the instrument off.

"Now I know we're up against something," she snapped, rising from the chair. "A barrier has been thrown up around that spot—an electrical barrier which deflects my x-ray. Whoever is responsible for this is certainly a clever scientist. But if I can't penetrate the barrier, I can at least satisfy myself."

She went to a super-sensitive oscillograph and switched it on, adjusting its direction-finder carefully. After a while there appeared upon the small viewing screen a pulsing zig-zag of wavy electrical lines.

"There we have it," the Amazon murmured, motioning to it. "Vast electrical energy some 7,000 miles away, which this instrument is picking up." She switched in the complementary sound equipment and crackling static sounded.

"There's its voice," she added; "the sound of electrons in free movement . . ." For a while she studied the screen and then switched off.

"You're quite sure you're right, Vi?" Chris asked. "There's a lot of electrical energy concentrated at the earth's poles. Sure you haven't got that by mistake? Or maybe the activity of the Aurora Australis?"

The Amazon shook her head. "It's not that. I've seen the kind of trademark the Aurora Australis makes—and the Borealis, too, for that matter. It's altogether different. The answer here is that a huge amount of electrical power is concentrated at the South Pole, and only a scientist can be at the back of it."

"And an enemy, judging from the way civilization is being disrupted," Ethel remarked.

The Amazon considered for a while. "The only serious enemies we ever had were Carl Mueller and Emilian Voltique, and I disposed of both of them—Mueller in the void, and Voltique in a Venusian volcano. As far as I am aware nobody else remains to threaten us. In fact I was perfectly sure after finishing off Voltique that I could retire to more or less peaceful pursuits and continue my experiments with electronic transportation without fear of interruption. Now we have this. . . ."

CHAPTER V

THERE was silence in the laboratory for a moment, then the Amazon seemed to make up her mind.

"Well, there is nothing to be gained by conjecture. I'll have to go to Antarctica and see for myself."

"But suppose you meet the fate of those two pilots I sent?" Chris asked seriously.

"There's a big difference between a jet plane and my machine—the Ultra," the girl said. "I think it's capable of dealing with any queer business that our unknown enemy might attempt."

"Shall I go with you?" Chris inquired.

"You can't. You're needed at Space headquarters. No; I'll manage this on my own. I'll not attempt anything to start with. I'll simply look around."

"On your own!" Ethel ejaculated clearly disappointed. "But what about me? Can't I go? After all that happened on Venus, this piffling little affair in the Antarctic is merely footling. You can't say no, Aunt Vi."

"I can—and I do," the Amazon responded calmly. "Your estimate of a 'piffling little trouble' is a pretty poor one, Rosy Cheeks. We're dealing with somebody with profound electrical knowledge, one who can evidently produce destructive magnetic storms at will. I'm going to spy out the land for myself. Later, when I'm sure there is no real risk, you can perhaps come with me."

"Well, all right," Ethel sighed. "When do you leave?"

The Amazon glanced at the electric clock. "Within an hour. I'll just change and then be on my way."

Chris said, "Let us know the moment you get any information, Vi."

"Of course I will."

Fifteen minutes later the superb woman in the evening gown returned to the laboratory in a one-piece garment of black, a gold belt in which reposed instruments, buckled about her slender waist.

Crossing the laboratory with the lithe movements of a panther, she opened a connecting door and stepped into a lofty-roofed hangar in which, in the glare of arclight, flood the 300-foot length of her own space-and-air machine, the Ultra—one of the most remarkable achievements in air and space travel in the world. Wherever the Amazon exerted her scientific engineering genius the result was usually unique, and this machine embodied her strange gifts in excelsis.

She glanced about her and then stepped through the machine's airlock, closing and sealing it behind her. Crossing to the driving seat, she settled in the soft springs. A touch on a button released a photo-electric cell beam which reacted on the hangar wall. As a result, the lights went out and the roof opened into two halves—and would stay open for 15 minutes and then close, during which time the Ultra would have passed into the upper air.

Moving another switch, the Amazon set the power plant in operation—atomic force. With hardly a sound save for a deep bass throbbing, the machine, wingless and looking like a submarine, rose with the vertical ease of a helicopter, hovered at 500 feet, and then darted southward.

The Amazon smiled to herself as she built up speed steadily to 1,000 miles an hour, and then higher to 1,500, streaking like a dark pencil through the winter sky. It was a perfect night, stars blazoning the crisp heavens from horizon to horizon. Infinitely far below, for she had driven the machine nearly to the stratosphere, glinted the firefly lights of cities. She had every reason to smile. She was never happier than when alone in the vast expanses of the sky or the incomprehensible deeps of space. She had the peculiar, even enviable, faculty of being blissfully serene when earth and its squabbling inhabitants were immeasurably far away from her.

Carefully she checked her course and turned the machine's nose slightly, the radar-screens making the landscape below appear as bright as day as invisible light was trapped and transformed.

She was passing over Sardinia, and soon would be crossing the spot where once had stood Malta, destroyed by Carl Mueller's atomic V-10s in an earlier battle she had fought with the Austrian physicist . . . A sudden slight sound behind her made her turn sharply. In the brilliant shadowless glare of the cold-light lamp in the roof stood Ethel, looking half amused and half frightened.

"Well, of all the—!" The Amazon stared at her blankly.

"Now don't blow up, Aunt Vi!" Ethel urged quickly, hurrying forward. "You'd have done the same yourself in my place."

"The trouble with you, Rosy, is that you've too much of your father in you," the Amazon sighed, shaking her fair head. "Just the sort of stunt he'd have done—20 years ago. In fact he did. That was how he met your mother. But how are you going to explain your absence to your father?"

"He knows all about it," Ethel explained brightly.

"He does, does he?" The Amazon gave a grim smile. "In fact he connived with you?"

"I'm afraid so. He says it doesn't do any good to thwart a girl's love of adventure. I stowed away while you were changing. I know how the door to the hangar opens. Honest, aunt, you don't mind, do you?"

"I'm only too glad you're here," the Amazon smiled. "My favorite companion—" Her violet eyes went over Ethel's young and shapely figure attired now in red slacks and blouse. "And you've changed from evening dress, too!"

"I had the time, and you've a locker full of all sorts of clothes in this vessel. These clothes are yours, but I know you won't mind even if they are a size too big."

The Amazon motioned to the seat next to her own. "Sit here, young lady, and say no more. I only hope this trip is uneventful, otherwise your father is going to regret letting you come."

Ethel settled down, swept the dark hair from her intelligent forehead and looked eagerly into the night. The bowed outlook window was so angled that it cast no reflections from inside the control room. There might have been no glass whatever impeding the view of the endless stars and glowing lights far below.

"Wonderful, isn't it?" Ethel murmured presently. "Not as wonderful as space travel, of course, but still pretty good. Where are we?"

"At the moment somewhere over the

Soudan. Those lights on the horizon must be from distant towns and cities."

Ethel said nothing more for a while and the Amazon bent her head to study the instruments. She looked up again sharply as Ethel gave a sudden cry.

"Look!" She pointed through the window. "What's that, far ahead? Lights—or something . . ."

The Amazon stared intently into the vast distances. Segmented by the horizon curve was a spreading arc of brilliance, a shimmering nebulosity of white, yellow and muddy brown at the edges, shot through with cascading bars of lavender. It grew higher in the sky as the two women watched it, seemed to also become larger as at 1,500 miles an hour the Ultra hurtled in its direction.

"It's directly over the South Pole," the Amazon said finally, with a glance at the master compass.

"Is it the Aurora Australis?" Ethel asked, staring at it.

"No. It's the same thing Commander Anderson saw—that strange aura which preceded a storm. Electrical energy in enormous quantities."

CHAPTER VI

THE stars were blacking out before dense clouds and the distant aura faded as the clouds blocked it. The Ultra was darting onward into the midst of an area which was already flashing with lightning and bearing with it a hurricane wind.

"I see no point in us risking this," the Amazon murmured, and adjusted the controls. Instantly the Ultra's nose tilted upward, and with superb ease it climbed far above the atmosphere's limits and the ionic layer. With a burst the atomic rockets came into being and the machine was travelling through free space, the atmospheric envelope outside now so attenuated as to be virtually non-existent.

"Pity those two fliers didn't have a space ship instead of an airplane," Ethel commented, looking at the icy stars which hung now without the intervention of atmosphere.

"Great pity," the Amazon agreed quietly. "Now let's see what we have below."

She moved a switch operating the telescopic radar screens. The beams penetrated the raging tumult of the storm below and the telescopic lenses fitted on the receiving apparatus foreshortened the view given back to the screens. The scenes displayed might have been in daylight, so acutely clear were they. Ethel and the Amazon studied them in profound interest.

According to the instruments they were just over Madagascar, but that big island was in the throes of a titanic storm. Even as the two watched they saw buildings—erected by colonists of the 1970's—collapsing under the onslaught of lightning bolts, trees crashing in a mighty wind and a deluge of rain.

Then, so fast was the Ultra moving and so great its elevation above the earth, the view was gone and replaced by the hurricane-lashed waters of the Southern Indian ocean.

"Why attack Madagascar, I wonder?" Ethel asked.

The Amazon switched off the radar screens.

"Because," she answered sombrely, "that island is loaded up with all manner of war potential as a protection for the Southern Hemisphere. That was agreed upon by the World Parliament not so long ago, remember. Wrecking Madagascar by storm is a good idea—from the point of view of the attacker. It will cripple all means of defence for Africa, Australia and India." She frowned and narrowed her eyes. "There's something mighty big behind all this, Rosy, if only I could think what it is."

Characteristically, she gave up pondering the matter and turned her attention to navigating the Ultra. The further the machine hurtled across the ocean, presently reaching the Southern ocean and outermost edges of the Antarctic continent, the more the tumult below cleared—until at last there was a clear vision of that weird aura blazing upward from the south polar regions. Suddenly, however, it died out and the night was instantly dark and cloudless.

"That settles it!" Ethel exclaimed. "No natural phenomenon could vanish in that fashion, just like pressing off a light switch. There's a human hand directing operations."

"How right you are!" the Amazon breathed. "And we'd better start dropping and see what we can find. We're not very far short now of the latitude-longitude where those two pilots ran into trouble."

She cut off the rockets and the machine dropped swiftly, gave the slightest of jerks as it hit the atmospheric envelope again, and then continued the downward plunge, falling through the night like a dark meteor until, within 3,000 feet of the earth's surface, the Amazon switched in the normal controls and levelled the machine out. At a pace of no more than 400 miles an hour the Ultra went across the ice barriers of Antarctica, guided solely by the flawless compasses and instruments to the predetermined latitude-longitude position.

Sure enough the mountain range Baines and Alton had seen presently loomed on the radar screens. The Amazon set the Ultra rising again and in silence she and Ethel watched the awesome glaciers go skimming past below them as they crossed the highest point of the range. To the north a red glow pulsing skyward denoted the presence of a volcanic crater.

"I'm mighty thankful you built this machine, Aunt Vi," Ethel said presently. "Otherwise I wouldn't feel any too safe here. Reminds me of the Lunar Appenines, except for the fact that there's air."

The Amazon said nothing, dividing her attention between the outlook window and the radar screens. She drove on until at long last the main bulk of the mountain range was behind them and they were cruising over a vast dark bowl in the earth, a bowl spotted with lights.

"This is what those pilots saw," the Amazon muttered. "And—"

"And those must be the towers with sparks!" Ethel interrupted. "See!"

From four different points in the vast bowl below tall metal structures were visible, half their lengths from the summit down illumined by a coruscating lavender glare which seemed to be emanating from polished spheres.

"More electricity," the Amazon commented. "This place seems to be positively soaked in current—"

She broke off in alarm as the Ultra dipped noticeably, then with a sighing moan the atomic motor, electrically controlled, cut out dead.

"We're falling!" Ethel gasped hoarsely, aware of the rushing of the wind past the now silent vessel.

The Amazon bent urgently to the switches, operating them one after another, even bringing the emergency battery circuit into commission, but the result was the same. Every electrical contact in the vessel was dead, including the radar screens and the electric compass. Only the cold light in the roof, non-electrical and self-contained, still burned.

Finally the Amazon seized the hand-control levers which operated the machine's flying gear. Just in time, too, for she swung the vessel free from a mighty rampart of the mountain range as, with gathering velocity, the Ultra fell.

Neither woman had any time for words. Their whole attention was rivetted on the mountains as crags and spurs loomed out in the dark, gleaming white under the stars for a moment and then swinging past as the Amazon shifted the controls. For all that, it was a battle which her navigating skill could not hope to win.

Abruptly, in dodging from a looming wall that seemed to go up to infinity, she twisted the machine back into another wall. There was a violent impact which hurled both women out of their seats and with a crashing, grinding roar the Ultra landed nose first in a glacier and remained rooted firmly, its tail slightly in the air, big blocks of ice bouncing away from it and rolling down the vast field of ice which led to the edge of a precipice.

CHAPTER VII

THE Amazon lay motionless for a while in a corner, then as the ship remained steady she got to her feet and looked about her. The roof light was still functioning and Ethel, rubbing her head dazedly, was lying in a huddled heap in front of the switchboard. The Amazon raised her to her feet, shook her gently back to awareness. Ethel was unhurt, save for a swelling bruise on her forehead.

The Amazon moved to the controls and tested them. Her grim expression was sufficient comment.

"Electrical influence still holding us helpless," she said bitterly. "As far as the vessel itself is concerned, it doesn't seem to have been damaged, except perhaps for some buckling of the surface plates where it hit the ice—but I can't do a thing while the electrical power is cut off. Our only course if we want to find what's going on in this valley is to go on foot."

Ethel moved to the observation window and looked outside. There was a long icefield stretching away on a slope from the Ultra, ending in a precipice. Whatever lay beyond that she had no idea; the angle was too steep for her to see.

"It won't be any picnic exploring," she said doubtfully.

"I warned you not to come," the Amazon shrugged. "It won't worry me; I can stand any rigors. But I'm not so sure about you."

Ethel considered, then she pouted her lips obstinately.

"I'm coming! Nobody's going to call me a liability, anyway."

The Amazon brought out fur suits for both of them. Before she put on her own, she removed her belt of instruments and fastened it round the suit instead. Before long she and Ethel were ready, provided with provisions and ropes, spiked boots on their feet. Ethel went across to the airlock and spun off the big screws. As the cover opened a biting wind came surging into the control chamber and what warmth there was—failing rapidly through electric power being cut off—vanished altogether.

"For a volcanic range this is a mighty cold spot," Ethel commented, staring out over the glacial waste visible in the starlight.

"Depends on the altitude," the Amazon told her. "We're many thousand feet up, don't forget. Anyway, come on."

They began the treacherous descent, and it was slow and dangerous going. Finally they came to the edge of the glacier, and the precipice. A howling blizzard came surging up it, flinging frozen snow into their faces from lower down the mountain side. The Amazon looked intently into the depths. Then at last she uncoiled her length of thin but immensely tough rope. Securing it round a jutting rock spur with a slip-knot—so she could free it again from below—she cast the free end of the cord downward.

"There's a ledge and a declivity down there," she told Ethel. "We can just about reach it and go on from there. We'll go together."

"Together?" Ethel repeated in surprise.

"Safest," the Amazon said, and without further words she caught the girl round the waist with her left arm and held her to her with superlative ease. Using her right hand to grip the rope, she slid over the cliff edge and lowered herself in a series of jerks, Ethel clinging to her tightly. They gained the ledge below and, as the Amazon's keen eyes had noted, there was a declivity leading down the cliff face.

"We're not such a long way from our goal, anyway," Ethel said. "Look down there."

The Amazon shook the rope free from the spur above and gazed at a multitude of lights far below.

"Farther away than you'd think, Rosy," she said. "The clear air makes distance deceptive. . . . Let's be on our way."

They linked arms and followed the declivity against a blizzard wind. Gradually, overcoming each obstacle in their downward journey, they found the air becoming warmer and the snow and ice less prevalent—until after perhaps two hours of hard mountaineering, which had exhausted Ethel considerably, they came to the rocky foothills of the mountains and had the great mysterious valley with its winking lights and glowing four towers spread out before them nearly on a level with their vision.

They stopped to take off their fur suits and strap them, rolled up, on their backs.

"Want to rest awhile?" the Amazon asked.

Ethel shook her head. "Not for me. We've got this far so we might as well finish it."

"It may not be so easy as that. I hardly expect hospitality from the tenants of this valley."

"We'll risk it," Ethel decided, and so they went forward again together.

As they moved on, the Amazon dropped her right hand lightly to the butt of her deadly protonic-gun. Her eyes were alert in the uncertain darkness for the slightest sign of movement or enemy, but they arrived on the outermost edges of what appeared to be a fair-sized town, illumined by tall flickering gas lights perched on rough stone pillars—before they saw a living soul.

"Must be ignited volcanic gas," the Amazon said. "Same sort of thing as is used in some parts of Venus. And these houses are just like those in England in the Middle Ages. Low roofs, tiny mullioned windows— Watch yourself!" she broke off curtly, as the first sign of life appeared—and she and Ethel came to a wary halt.

The figure came out of the gaslight slowly and resolved into a young and graceful girl, no more than 16, attired in a dress with a very high bodice, puffed sleeves, and voluminous skirt.

"She looks like a Dutch girl," Ethel whispered. "Native costume of Holland, I mean. It's a fashion that went out ages ago . . ."

The girl caught sight of the two women suddenly, paused in mild astonishment, and then came toward them with a smile. The smile faded and was replaced by a look of blank surprise as her eyes travelled over the ultra-modern attire of the two women and finally to the Amazon's levelled protonic-gun.

"Whom—art thou?" the girl asked at last, hesitating. "Thou art none that I know, that I swear. Thy faces mean nothing to me."

"Who are you?" the Amazon asked. "What is this place? Who are you people?"

"I am Mistress Esther, daughter of the landlord of yonder tavern," the girl answered, and motioned to an old English-looking inn with a swinging board outside it, on which was inscribed the sign—"The Sinking Swan."

"We've gone crazy, Aunt Vi," Ethel breathed. "Maybe it was the altitude up in the mountains. We've slipped back in time, somehow. This is England way back in the Middle Ages."

"Nay," the girl Esther contradicted, smiling again. "This ist Melrose Valley—Wouldst care to meet my father?"

"I think," the Amazon said, replacing her gun in the belt but keeping her hand on the butt, "that we'd better. On your way, Mistress Esther, and we'll follow."

Frowning in wonderment, Ethel close beside her, the Amazon followed the graceful girl across the cobbled street and into the tavern. Low beams were across the ceiling; swinging lamps burning an oil of some kind hung from them. There were rustic chairs and tables, a large display of pewter pots and dishes—and seated at a corner table at his ease and smoking a long clay pipe was evidently mine host. He rose, a man of immense girth, as the girl entered with the two women behind her.

"Father, I have found strangers!" the girl exclaimed excitedly. "I know them not—nor, haply, dost thou. I—"

There was a certain expression in her father's cold blue eyes which stilled the girl's further words. He jerked his head.

"Go thou, daughter, and help they mother," he ordered. "She hast much to do."

He waited until the girl had departed and then turned to size up the two women. He was a powerful-featured man, bearded, his hair grizzled, and profound suspicion in his blue eyes.

"I would remark," the Amazon said, "that we are just as puzzled by all this, as you must be by us . . . I understand that this is Melrose Valley?"

"Aye. What of it?"

"And you people talk English—a very ancient form of it."

"Since it hast been used always, shouldst we change it?"

"But—" the Amazon made a perplexed gesture. Then she asked, "Do you mind if we rest here awhile? My companion and I are tired. Our air machine was wrecked in the mountains and we have finished our journey on foot."

CHAPTER VIII

THE landlord still contemplated them in dour suspicion. Then at last he nodded.

"I grant thee that—thou canst rest. Sit thee down and I wilt bring some food for thee—and perchance some wine to quaff?"

"Thank you," the Amazon assented, nodding. "That will be fine."

She motioned to the gaping Ethel

and they both seated themselves at the nearest rustic table and watched the landlord lumber out. The moment he had done so, Ethel's emotions exploded. "What's gone wrong?" she demanded. "Have we missed our direction, or what? Instead of finding superscientific enemies all we discover is a race of people who think they are in the Middle Ages and talk that way. I just don't understand it."

"Neither do I—yet," the Amazon replied. "But we will, Rosy. This is the place we're looking for, surprise though it is to find people like this." She frowned and mused. "Melrose," she repeated slowly. "Melrose? I've heard that name somewhere and in connection with something unusual too. Maybe I'll remember later . . ."

She fell silent, pondering deeply while Ethel looked about her upon the rustic appointments and mullioned windows. She felt as if she were living in a dream. Warm air, in the heart of the Antarctic, and two characters who had stepped out of medieval times—yet also four towers radiating a mysterious energy which had crashed the superscientific Ultra in the mountain range and rendered it useless. The vast incongruity of everything was staggering.

Presently mine host returned, bearing a tray on which were two heavy tankards, a flagon of red wine, and a piled-up mass of sandwiches on two plates. The food was simple, wholesome fare.

"Whether I be right in doing this for thee I know not," he said at length. "From the way thou speakest thou must belong to yon scum who have taken control of this fair land of ours—yet, mine own instincts telleth me that thou art not enemies."

"Certainly we are not enemies," the Amazon replied. "But you interest me, landlord. Who has taken control of this land?"

"I know not rightly—but 'tis somebody with terrible power! We were happy till these people came—yea, came over yon mountains in a flying bird of great size. In all truth there were many great birds. They set up laws and rules, and we must obey them or 'twill go ill with us. Thou, too, camest in a bird, didst thou not say? An—airplane?"

"Something like it," the Amazon responded. "But we are friends. Don't you know anything about these people? Who they are?"

"'Tis impossible to question them," the landlord growled. "To do so, or to raise one finger in protest, is to bring down disaster upon mine house—aye, and upon my wife and daughter."

There was the sudden sound of marching feet on the cobblestones outside, and two powerful men with strange weapons in their hands, entered the room. They were in uniform—which bore no recognizable insignia, and moved in a way that suggested a Teutonic origin.

The taller of the two said to the landlord: "You are aware of the penalty for this, my friend?" And the inflexion of his voice immediately confirmed the Teutonic theory.

The landlord glared, obstinacy in his rugged face.

"I have done nothing that is wrong," he retorted. "When two women cometh to me after a long journey and asketh for rest it is my Christian duty to—"

"Shut up! The law of this valley is that no stranger shall be entertained by the inhabitants. You also know the penalty."

He brought up his weapon to level it, but the Amazon hurled herself forward, caught the guard's gun wrist and whirled it upward. His queer weapon sent out a scorching trail of fire, then it was torn from his hand and hurled across the room.

The Amazon crashed her right fist into the guard's jaw and sent him flying into his companion as he too leveled his gun.

As both men reeled back the Amazon measured them and then hurtled forward again. Gasping, both men found themselves lifted by their uniform belts, one in each of the Amazon's hands, and flung with blinding impact into the midst of the rustic chairs and tables. Half stunned and utterly dazed, they collapsed on the floor and stared up at the cold-eyed beauty gazing down on them.

"To make a law is one thing," she said, "but to carry it out another. Who are you? What are you doing here, bullying these people with your inhuman regulations?"

They were silent, and she took a menacing step towards them.

"You'd better tell me, or I'll—"

"You'll what, Miss Brant?" a man's voice asked quietly from the doorway. "And take it easy! You're covered — and so is Miss Wilson."

The Amazon turned slowly. Silently, four more guards had arrived, their weapons ready. The speaker was a man she had never seen before—tall, blond, heavily handsome. With a cynical smile he advanced.

"You do not know me," he said, "nor do I see why you should since I am merely a servant of the regime. I know you, however, because all the world knows you—the Golden Amazon, superscientist, and the strongest and most beautiful woman in the world. Only at the moment I have the advantage." Suddenly he dropped his easy tone. "Come over here!" he ordered.

The Amazon hesitated, then seeing that the odds were hopelessly against her she passively submitted. She made to reach for the furs on the chairs but the blond guard stopped her.

"You won't need those," he told her curtly. "In fact, where you are bothgoing it will be quite warm—even hot." His eyes strayed to the two guards who were getting up from the floor. "Just as well I brought reinforcements," he commented. "I might have known that two guards would not be able to capture the Golden Amazon . . . And as for you, my friend," he said to the landlord, "two of my men will deal with you and your wife and daughter. Laws are made to be obeyed, as you'll soon learn."

"But—you're not going to kill them?" Ethel gasped in horror.

"All three," the guard answered her coldly. "And there is nothing you or this superwoman can do about it. Now, outside, both of you."

In silence the Amazon and Ethel walked away in the midst of the guards, leaving behind the two men who were to deal with the landlord and his hapless family.

"We have a walk of half a mile to our destination," the chief guard said.

"Where are we going?" the Amazon asked.

"You are going to work, Miss Brant —and you, Miss Wilson—harder than you ever worked before, deep in the volcanic mines of this extraordinary valley, helping the other slaves to mine certain rare ores that are used in the construction of electrical machinery. It would be just as easy to kill you both here and now, of course, but the controller prefers that you work."

"Who is the controller?" the Amazon asked.

"I am not permitted to tell you that. I can at least tell you that radio detectors noted the fall of your machine to the mountain side, and after that, Amazon, an aura-compass set to your frequency kept track of you until you arrived at the tavern."

"Kept track of my aura?" the Amazon repeated in amazement. "But how does it come to be known? The only person except myself who ever knew my frequency was Carl Mueller, and he died many years ago. I know he did."

"Yes," the guard agreed. "Carl Mueller died."

And he said no more.

CHAPTER IX

THE aura-compass worked on the principle of being able to detect any person anywhere, either on a planet or in space, by virtue of the fact that no two human beings possess an identical aura any more than they possess identical fingerprints.

An electrified needle swinging in a vacuum case, the needle being diamond-tipped, was capable of pointing directly to a chosen person the moment it was energized with the correct frequency. A simple process of swinging the needle gave almost to a few feet the distance of the person from the compass.

The invention had been the Amazon's own, but in course of time progressive science had learned the secret and utilized it. But that her aura wavelength should be known was something she could not fathom.

"You mentioned electrical machinery," she said. "For what purpose?"

"I am not answering any more questions," the guard responded. "Keep walking."

The Amazon looked about her. There was still nothing to distinguish this cobbled street from a street in any medieval town—but presently the ultra-modern note became evident in the tall towers at the four corners of the valley, the spheres at their summits flickering with lavender light.

"As long as those remain in action," the guard said, "no prying vessel can get beyond the mountain range."

"You mean," the Amazon remarked, "that they are responsible for holding my Ultra's electrical apparatus out of action?"

"No. That is done by a separate beam. Those four towers produce a screen of energy round the valley."

"Because of which those two pilots we sent crashed?"

"That and a beam which killed their electrical equipment. They died in the mountains. We found their bodies."

Realizing the guard had evidently forgotten his resolution not to answer questions, the Amazon asked another.

"The screen of energy which surrounds this valley is also powerful enough to deflect x-rays, I take it?"

"It is. It completely isolates this basin from all means of communication with the outer world, including radio waves. If we wish to send out radio waves, or any other kind of electrical energy, we cut off the screen to allow the transmission free passage."

"And I assume that the storms which are devastating the outer world are coming from here?" the Amazon asked.

Since the guard did not reply to this, she indicated a couple of towers which had now come into sight. They were in the centre of the valley, one of them at least 500 feet high, and the other perhaps 300 feet.

"The smaller one is the radio tower," the guard said, seeing the Amazon's interest. "The other one is what we call a disseminator tower. It has — many uses."

They came to a region beyond the town where, illumined by electric arcs, there was a pit-head, the gear being of metal with immense wheels at the summit from which depended cables. Around it were guards.

"Get in," the blond guard ordered, nodding to the waiting cage.

Ethel gave the Amazon a horrified look and complied.

The elevator seemed to go down for miles through a shaft of intense darkness—then gradually into an area of faintly merging light. With it came waves of heat, until by the time the bottom of the shaft had been reached it seemed—to Ethel at least—to be pretty close to the temperature reigning in the Venusian Highlands. Since she had been able to stand that without ill effect she prayed that she would be able to stand this also. Upon the Amazon the raging temperature apparently had no effect.

Here, deep down in this subtropical basin, was activity beyond imagination. A vast natural cavern had obviously been made larger by mechanical means, and men and women were at work on all manner of tasks—chiefly operating machines which gouged glittering metal ores from the very walls. In another direction there was the glare of electric furnaces. Giant cranes towered up, some of them bearing crucibles full of ores to the electric furnaces, where men stripped to the waist were controlling streams of molten metal. Deafening noise, chiefly from the clang of metal upon metal, and brilliant lights overhead, contributed their nerve-racking distractions to the tumult.

"You will both work here until further orders," the guard said, motioning to an overseer. "And I warn you that the work will be very hard — even killing," he added meaningly; and turned aside to give instructions to the overseer. This done, he returned to the elevator, joined his fellow guards, and sent the cage up the shaft.

"So—the Golden Amazon, eh?" the overseer asked as he surveyed the girl. "The pretty, strong woman come to work for us! And you will work—both of you—like demons. I'll see to that!"

This man stood six feet three and was proportionately broad.

He swung the short three-thonged whip he carried. "You"—and he looked at Ethel—"go and help that party over there to move those girders."

Ethel went—a curiously incongruous figure in her slacks and silk shirt—and joined the men and women toiling with lengths of girders.

"As for you, Amazon, there's about a ton of ore over there to be shovelled into that crane crucible. You can start with that and show some of that famous strength of yours. And before you go, I'll take this." He reached out, snapped the buckle on the belt which the girl had transferred to her waist when taking off her furs, and fastened it on himself.

Without a word, though there was cold venom in her purple eyes, the Amazon went across to the small hill of ore, picked up the shovel and began transferring it into the metal crucible depending from the chain of the travelling crane.

Separated from the Amazon, Ethel struggled and toiled with the girder lengths—a crushing job. Exhausted as she was after her mountain journey, there was only one end to her gradually flagging efforts.

In helping a party of three to move a girder she collapsed under its weight. The sudden strain she threw on her fellow workers overbalanced them, the girder slipped from their grasp.

A young man at the front end of the girder got the worst of it, falling underneath the imprisoning weight and gasping as the heavy metal pinned him down across the small of his back. He heaved and struggled in vain to drag himself free from it.

The workers moved to assist him, Ethel with them, but the harsh voice of the overseer checked them.

"Wait a minute! What's going on here?"

The workers hesitated, looking at Ethel. She turned defiant eyes on the giant towering over her.

"If you must know, it was my fault," she said. "I couldn't raise the thing, and if you had any sense you'd know I couldn't. You've got cranes. Why don't you use them?"

"Because they move stuff heavier than this," the overseer answered, his eyes narrowing.

Ethel flung him a glance of contempt and then hurried forward to the young man who was striving to free himself. Dropping to her knees, she tugged futilely at the heavy metal.

"Help me, somebody!" she implored, looking round on the workers as they hung back.

The answer came from the overseer. His whip whirled round his head and the three lashes cut with fiendish force into Ethel's back, slashing the thin silk of her blouse into ribbons. Red streaks instantly showed on the flesh beneath. Tears started into her eyes and she gasped in anguish. Before she had recovered her breath the lash descended again and she collapsed on her face.

"While you are here, my pampered young friend, you'll learn to work and obey orders!" the overseer roared. "You'll not help other workers or answer back . . ."

Cold, malevolent fury flamed into the Amazon's face as she glimpsed what was happening.

She whirled the workers who barred her path out of the way and hurtled across the intervening space. The overseer had raised his lash for a third merciless slash when the Amazon's yellow fingers closed round his wrist.

She whipped her arm back, and the overseer felt as though a chain had tugged him. He half over-balanced and then found the Amazon's other hand smashing down on his forearm while his wrist was still held. There was a distinct crack and an insufferable agony seared to his shoulder as his arm broke.

"I've been wanting to meet you on equal terms, my friend, and this seems as good a time as any," the Amazon told him. "Men with your sort of authority need breaking—permanently."

Ethel looked up from the floor in relief. The workers still hung back, appalled. Silence had dropped on the huge room at this vision of a slender woman challenging the six-foot-three overseer.

CHAPTER X

THE man swung a mighty blow with his left hand, but instead of it hitting the venomous yellow face he felt as though something had exploded between his eyes. Not a second afterward a bunched fist the color of gold smote him with devastating force on the nose and broke it.

Half blinded, he rocked on his feet, doubled up at a sickening punch in the stomach. Then the thongs of his own whip lashed across his back and shoulders. He howled at the sudden agony which bit deeply into him.

With six frightful cuts the Amazon was satisfied; then she tossed the whip aside, seized the groaning giant and lifted him from the floor. He had little idea what happened, but those around saw the incredible power of the girl's arms fling him over the heads of the nearer circle of workers.

He crashed into the man controlling the molten metal crucible at the electric furnace. The man was sent flying and the molten metal rolled from its prison in a flood of scalding fire.

Pandemonium broke loose. Work

ceased and every worker turned and fled away from the slow-moving deadly mass creeping across the stone floor. The Amazon whirled up Ethel and tossed her to safety. Underneath the girder the young man struggled frantically to free himself, his horrified eyes fixed on the sizzling tide coming towards him.

The Amazon hesitated. As a rule it was not her policy to help any man in trouble, it being her firm conviction that no man was worth it. Then Ethel gripped her arm.

"You've got to, Aunt Vi!" she insisted. "You can't leave him—to that—!"

The Amazon's lips tightened. "All right," she muttered. "I'll do it because he may be useful."

She stooped, seized the girder, braced herself and heaved it up, and the young man jumped sideways.

"Thanks," he panted, staring at the Amazon in wonder. "Thanks again and again. Thou are a marvel woman indeed—"

"Never mind me," the Amazon interrupted; "how do we get out of this place without using the elevator? Is there a way?"

"Yea, there ist a way. Follow me."

He turned and pushed through the surging people. The Amazon turned to Ethel, who was half fainting from the strain and the whip lashing she had received. The next thing she knew she was being hauled over the Amazon's shoulder and borne through the struggling throngs.

The Amazon followed the worker down a relatively quiet tunnel, lighted by the flare or ignited volcanic gas at intervals.

"Where does this lead?" she asked the worker.

"To the surface. Oft times there ist a guard at the entrance, but in the confusion he must have deserted."

They came at length into a small cavern fitted with massive doors at each side of it. The worker turned and closed and bolted the door to the tunnel up which they had come.

"We canst rest here," he said, breathing hard. "'Tis unlikely we wilt be followed."

The Amazon nodded and lowered Ethel from her shoulder and looked at her flayed back. Then she took the girl over to a corner and tore what remained of the girl's blouse into shreds and used it for bandaging. Then she motioned to the young man.

"Let me have your shirt," she ordered.

He looked surprised, but obeyed, tossing it over. The Amazon took it and eased it gently over Ethel's head.

"You'll be all right," the Amazon assured her. "You're healthy and those cuts will heal. My only regret is that I didn't break that overseer's neck instead of his arm. However, I imagine he didn't enjoy being mixed up with that molten metal. Come to think of it, I should have got my belt back from him. I was too excited to think of anything just then."

She turned aside to the young worker. Stripped to the waist he proved to be a painfully thin specimen with narrow shoulders and atrophied arms. His face too was bony and his black hair lank. He looked as though he had suffered ill-treatment over a long period of time.

"I've been trying to find out who you people are," the Amazon said. "All I know is that this is Melrose Valley—but it doesn't explain a race which speaks Old English and behaves like the English of the Middle Ages. What is the explanation?"

"'Tis simple enough," the young man said. "Our ancestors cameth here in 1564 and we art the children of the original settlers."

"Settlers?" the Amazon repeated. "You can't mean that your ancestors deliberately came to this place and braved the Antarctic ice?"

"My ancestors cameth accidentally," the young man explained. "They set sail from Portsmouth on June 10, 1564, bound for the East Indies. A storm overtook them and they wert driven to the northward. Some chance droveth them to the Antarctic Circle. At that time, for it wert the summer season, there wert a gap in the ice-fields through which the ship was driven. The ice closed in its rear so there wert no alternative but to go forward. The captain found a tunnel through yon mountain range—which encircles this basin—and so the shipwrecked people stumbled upon a green and pleasant land. Knowing they couldst never return to their native land they stablished their homes. They wert astonished to find they hadst everything—minerals, oil, water, timber, volcanic gas for lights and fires. So Melrose Valley—after the ship, the Melrose—wert stablished. We of today art the children of those pioneers, unchanged in habits and speech from the original settlers."

The Amazon snapped her fingers and a sudden gleam came into her eyes.

"And then?" the Amazon asked. "What happened? Something came and destroyed your peace?"

"A group of devils!" the worker declared. "First we beheld strange machines, which hovered in the air high over our valley. They cameth many times, but didst not descend . . ."

"Making observations, I expect. Then what?"

"After a long period—when one day period wast beginning and a night period wast ending, for we have six months of each in this valley—as many as 12 large air machines descended into our valley and a reign of terror began. We wert driven from our homes, thrashed or slain if we showed any resistance—and so, gradually, we cameth to be slaves of a strange conquering horde from the outer world. We glimpsed many weird wonders beyond our knowledge, such as talking over vast distances—"

"Radio," the Amazon said. "That is a commonplace accomplishment in the outer world today. You people have stagnated here. You were turned into slaves so that you could work in the mines and get metal for machinery?"

"Yea, though what the machines imply I knoweth not. I wast one of those who defied these interlopers, and so became a slave. I saw mine parents killed before mine eyes. Only those who wert willing to follow peaceful pursuits, or wert too old or too young, wert spared actual slavery."

"In other words," the Amazon said slowly, with a glance at Ethel, "a perfect example of a highly scientific group of people descending on a peaceful, ignorant race and overpowering them by brute force and superior knowledge. It's an old tactic, and to a certain extent it works. Tell me—er—What is your name?" by the way.

"Rufus."

"Tell me, Rufus, have you ever seen the person who is the head of this organization?"

"Nay. None have seen the one called the Controller—save those who work under orders."

"I have to see this Controller at an early date," the Amazon said, her face grim. "I've an account to settle. Do you know anything about the artificially created storms which are sent from here?"

"Nay, I knoweth nothing of such wonders."

The Amazon said: "We had better be on our way. Lead on, Rufus."

The young man went across the cavern to the second doorway where the tunnel continued. The Amazon and Ethel followed, Ethel with flagging footsteps. The Amazon said:

"Is there nowhere we can rest and have food? My companion is almost exhausted."

"If we canst but get free of this underworld it should be possible to reach my home," the worker replied. "There ist food which I canst get from my neighbors, old people who art not slaves. But it dependeth on whether we canst get free of this tunnel."

"I understood you to say it leads to the outer world," the Amazon said, as they hurried on.

"Of a truth it dost—up a metal ladder and through a grating which shouldst raise easily into the street. 'Tis one of the ventilation shafts which these conquerors fitted. But if the grating shouldst be locked on the outside—as ist possible after the panic in the smelting room—then we shalt not be able to get out."

"That depends," the Amazon murmured. "We'll see when we get there."

CHAPTER XI

IT proved to be a long journey through the twisting narrow tunnel, far longer than Ethel could manage on her own two feet. She finished the last two miles on the Amazon's shoulder—then at last Rufus gave a little cry of delight and pointed ahead to a metal ladder visible in the bobbing volcanic lights.

When they reached it the Amazon gazed up a long shaft with a tiny circle of gray light at the top, faintly visible as crossed by the bars of a grating.

"We canst only pray that 'tis unlocked," Rufus breathed, and began climbing the ladder, the Amazon coming up behind him with Ethel dangling over her shoulder—still conscious but tired out.

At the summit of the ladder Rufus gave a gasp of consternation.

"'Tis locked! As I hadst feared! It hast been bolted from the outside."

"Let me see," the Amazon ordered, and to Ethel she added, "Hang on to the ladder a moment."

Ethel slid wearily from her position and clung to the ladder tightly, supported by Rufus. The Amazon mounted above the two and pulled at the bars gently. They were an inch thick, but of not very case-hardened metal. Seizing the centre bar, she threw all her strength into the effort and twisted it sideways, and still further sideways, working it back and forth until finally one end of it snapped. To break off the other end was only the work of a moment and with a clang the bar landed in the bottom of the shaft.

One by one, straining with all her power, she snapped each bar free until there was only the locked framework—then she eased herself through the opening and looked about her. She was in the middle of an old-world street with the archaic buildings lighted by volcano-gas street lamps on both sides. Everywhere was peaceful: there was no sign of anybody about.

"All right, the coast's clear," she said, dropping to her knees and extending a hand below. "Up you come, Rosy."

She caught the girl's wrist and lifted her lightly through the opening, setting her on her feet. Rufus followed, glancing about him quickly.

"'Tis fortunate," he muttered. "The rest period."

"Rest period?" the Amazon repeated, taking Ethel on her shoulder again.

"Yea. We have periods for rest and periods for work. There ist no other way with six months day and six months night. 'Twill help us much. We art not likely to be seen."

Rufus led them to his home, a thatched-roof house with a cool, stone-flagged parlor. Gently he closed the door and motioned to a sofa.

The Amazon nodded and laid the weary Ethel upon it. Then she looked about her as the gloom of the room, only just made visible by a street lamp outside, was now somewhat mitigated by Rufus lighting an oil lamp. The yellow beams cast upon a parlor which was definitely old-fashioned but neat and clean. There was polished brassware table and chairs, an archaic type of fireplace, low beams across the ceiling from which hung the oil lamp.

He said: "This house hath not chanced by one trivet in all the time I hast been a slave. Mine neighbors must have kept it tidy whilst I was a captive. I wilt go and see if I canst get food and drink for us all."

He left, and the Amazon turned to Ethel who rested on a sofa.

"A meal and a sleep will put you right," she told her. "My only hope is that we can get both in peace."

Rufus returned with a tray on which was an ample meal.

The meal was finished without interruption, and Ethel was now more alert again.

"What do we do now?" she asked.

"As far as you are concerned, you sleep," the Amazon replied. "In fact we all need it—or at least you and Rufus do. And I might as well, I suppose."

"There art beds upstairs," Rufus said. "A big bed which mine parents used—and mine own small one. If thou and the other couldst use the big bed . . ."

"Just what we need." The Amazon got to her feet. "Come on, Rosy. After a sleep you'll be ready to tackle anything."

The three of them went up the narrow staircase, and without troubling to undress in even the smallest degree, Ethel threw herself on the large bed and promptly fell asleep. The Amazon lay down and put her hands behind her head, staring at the ceiling dimly illumined by a street lamp outside. She began thinking—and thinking.

She caught herself dozing. She was more tired than she had realized. Then she found herself abruptly awake again. She had heard sounds, and she got up and glided across the room to the door, opening it gently. Her strange faculty for being able, at will, to see in the dark made the staircase not entirely black. There were two uniformed guards creeping gently up it, their guns poised.

The Amazon withdrew, and shook Ethel gently into wakefulness, suppressing her mumbling inquiries.

"Get yourself awake, Rosy. There's trouble coming."

Ethel cleared her brain of the fogs of sleep and got off the bed, crouching in a corner of the room behind a big chair. She was not able to see much, but she did observe the shadowy Amazon crossing to the door where she took up a stand behind it.

"You try that room," a voice whispered in the passage outside. "I'll try this—and be prepared for anything. The Golden Amazon's dangerous, even if you're armed."

The door of the bedroom began to open gently. The Amazon could see the guard peering into the gloom. She bunched her right fist and landed a blow with all the power of her supernormal muscles.

Big though the guard was, he was lifted from his feet, reeled back across the narrow landing, smashed through the banister at the top, and then crashed down the stairs.

His comrade, half inside Rufus' room, came out to investigate. The Amazon dived for him, but she miscalculated the mat outside the doorway of her own room. It caught in her right foot and sent her stumbling. The guard, his eyes accustomed by now to the dark, brought down his gun on the back of the Amazon's neck, his instructions evidently being to capture, not kill her.

The force of the blow paralyzed her movements for a while, and before she could recover herself a steel manacle clicked about her left wrist; then another about her right. A pull on a short length of chain secured her hands immovably behind her.

"All right," the guard snapped. "You in that room there! Rufus, or whatever your name is—come out, and quick! And you, Miss Wilson, wherever you are."

Slowly, Ethel came forward. The guard peered at her, then turned sharply as Rufus also came into view.

"Good," the guard growled. "One, wrong move out of any of you, and I'll wing you—badly. Don't waste your time trying to break free, Amazon," the guard said cynically. "The Controller was prepared for this—and so is the chain. A special forging which even you won't be able to break . . . Downstairs, all of you!"

The Amazon led the way, deliberately treading on the body of the sprawled guard at the foot of the stairs. The remaining guard examined him briefly.

"Broken neck," he commented. "You don't pull your punches, do you, Amazon?"

"I hope to demonstrate the matter for you later on," she replied coldly. "All I need is the opportunity."

"Which you won't get. You're going before the Controller, who will decide your fate."

CHAPTER XII

THE party passed to the outdoors and to the cobbled street, walking thereafter through the deserted vistas until the old-fashioned core of the town was left behind and an ultra-modern layout began to make its appearance. Here there was no longer a huddle of low-eaved, oil-lighted houses, but massively square edifices, every window brilliant with electric light. Some of the buildings were small, others many storeys high, and all of them were apparently filled with industry since from them there drifted on the still air the buried thunder of machines.

"Power houses?" the Amazon questioned, her scientific curiosity rising as usual above personal danger.

"Power houses," the guard acknowledged. "Keep walking!"

A long walk brought them to a solid-looking building with a wide stone entrance where four guards stood at attention.

The way led into a wide hall, then presently the guard turned off it into a passage, finally opening a door and pushing the three captives into a room of immense proportions. It was quietly but tastefully furnished with all the luxuries which a western world could offer.

The guard retired. Then a distant door opened and closed. The Amazon gave a start and stared hard. It was not a man who had come into view, but a woman dressed in a black sweeping gown relieved by a single scarlet slash across the breast. She was tall, majestic, blonde.

"Who on earth . . ." Ethel stopped in amazement. "Who is she?"

"I haven't the slightest idea," the Amazon muttered

"This," the woman said, pausing within a few feet of the trio, "is most intriguing. I am quite delighted to meet you face to face, Miss Brant—or is it the Golden Amazon? And you, too, Miss Wilson. I've heard about you, of course."

The woman had a soft, cultured voice and there was worldly poise in her every movement. Her eyes were gray and extremely steady, her features regular with a strong mouth and chin.

"Are you the Controller?" the Amazon asked.

"Yes." The woman smiled. "Surprised?"

"I had expected a man."

"I thought you believed all cleverness to be embodied in a woman, Amazon?"

"I do . . . and all villainy in a man. Only a villain could be at the head of the foul organization running this basin."

The woman laughed softly to reveal fine teeth.

"You'll have to start revising your estimates, Amazon," she chided. "This villain wears skirts—as you see."

A little frown gathered on the Amazon's brow. "Who are you? Or shouldn't I ask?"

"You are perfectly entitled to ask, but I expect you'll be surprised at the answer . . . I am Irma Mueller."

"The daughter of Carl Mueller, I assume?"

"Exactly. The daughter of one of the most brilliant European physicists who ever lived, the daughter of the man you murdered when you made Venus safe for colonists. He was left behind, among his papers, your aura number—with which I have been able to keep track of you. I am fortunate, too, that Miss Wilson has tagged along with you. Forgive the precaution of the chains. I am considered a beautiful woman, Miss Brant, even as you are, but unfortunately I do not possess your superhuman strength. So I have to be cautious . . . Now, if you will step over here?"

The three turned toward a divan.

"Not you," Irma interrupted coldly to Rufus. "My conversation is hardly for an uneducated lout of your calibre." She clapped her slim hands sharply and the guard entered. She motioned. "Take this man into the corridor and keep him there. I'll tell you when I want him."

The guard saluted and Rufus was bundled out of the room.

Irma Mueller seated herself in a chair, and the Amazon said:

"What's all this about? You? This valley? Your organization?"

Irma Mueller said: "My father was a great scientist, and I am also a great scientist, partly from hereditary tendency, partly from a devout study of my father's methods and the wish to carry on the ambition which you, Miss Brant, so ruthlessly smashed.

"My father died 16 years ago, in 1970. At that time I was 12 years of age, living in Austria, from which country my father came. It was my mother, who died when I was 13, who made it clear to me that I had a purpose in life—the fulfilment of my father's dream. Now I am 28 and the fulfilment of that dream is all but realized."

"Your father's dream, Miss Mueller, was the mastery of the world by a small clique of brilliant scientists—men and women intent on avenging the defeat of European hegemony in the United Nations' war. Twice he nearly succeeded and it was I who finally broke him. You, I take it, are also trying to establish a mastery over the rest of the world?"

"Over the rest of the world — and Venus," Irma answered. "That planet is now included as part of Earth's possessions. My father was a very wealthy man, and his secrets, as far as his family was concerned, were open ones. His laboratory was there for me to study, and knowing of his untimely death at your hands I sorted out his every plan and mastered his every invention. I used up a considerable amount of my inherited fortune in gathering together all the experts I could to help me—those willing to re-establish the regime which war had defeated.

"We knew of this sub-polar basin, ideally suited for our purposes—and here we came, subduing these primitive fools who reside here. With us we imported enough strong men to act as guards, whilst the intelligentsia work in the laboratories we have erected, always moving toward one goal—mastery of the world."

"I only know one thing about this basin," the Amazon said, "and it is that it is the centre of vast storms which have been devastating the outer world, to say nothing of nearly making space and air travel impossible and disrupting communications."

"Which will go on indefinitely until everything is crippled," Irma said, smiling. "You see, Amazon, we have infinite power here to draw upon. That is our advantage. You, as a scientist, must know of the Earth's steady spin against the ether which acts in the same fashion as an armature housed in magnets. Enormous current is generated which concentrates at the poles, the surplus escaping in the fantastic displays which are called the Aurora Borealis and Australis."

"Yes," the Amazon agreed, "of that I'm aware. You mean you have tapped this inexhaustible power?"

"There's no doubt of it. It is three times more powerful than atomic force and certainly less costly since the Earth's own revolution provides it. That is what I meant by saying that this spot is ideally suited for our purposes, both geographically and as a hideout."

"How do you produce these devastating storms?" the Amazon questioned. "As a scientist I'm deeply interested."

"I'm sure you are," Irma Mueller murmured dryly. "Which is one reason why I have planned for you a most elaborate demonstration, one in which you will be able to take full part."

A glint had come into the gray eyes—a deadly glint, and the Amazon was not slow to notice it.

"For the moment," Irma finished, "I have told you all I intend to tell. There are other matters to attend to. I am referring to you, Miss Wilson."

"This girl had nothing to do with the death of your father, and you know it!" the Amazon snapped. "She was only a child at the time. In fact, your father abducted her."

"She is an enemy—the same as that lout of a worker in the corridor," Irma retorted. "She is a firm friend of yours and all you stand for, automatically a foe of the dynasty which I intend to establish in the name of Mueller. That is sufficient for me."

She rose and clapped her hands. The guard entered and at her order Rufus was brought in again while the guard remained with his gun ready.

"Both you and this worker," Irma said, glancing at Ethel, "are returning to the smelting room, and for the trouble you have caused your shifts will be doubled. There you will work out your lives—to the bitter end. And without this muscled lady friend of yours I am perfectly sure that you will never escape again."

"I'd rather die than go back there!" Ethel cried hoarsely, jumping up.

"Take them out," Irma ordered the guard. "Return them to the main smelting room and instruct the new overseer to give them double shift until further orders."

CHAPTER XIII

THE Amazon watched the three go from the room and the door closed. Futilely she strained again at the chain imprisoning her wrists. Irma smiled.

"I feel much happier when you and I are alone, Amazon," she said. "Both of us women of the world, both of us scientists, hating each other and as far apart in aims as night and day. Unique, really, isn't it? But we are wasting time. Come with me. I have much to show you."

The Amazon followed the woman to a laboratory of enormous dimensions. Here was great scientific power, most of it seeming to be connected with two polished spheres perched on top of gleaming 50-foot-high pillars which projected far up into the lofty roof. Everything everywhere was electrical.

"You have a wonderful laboratory here," the Amazon confessed.

"Yes." Irma's voice was cynical. "I'm so glad you approve. It is, as it were, the brains of our whole scientific organization—but the actual main power room is next door. There is the master plant responsible for the chaos which keeps striking the outer world. The atomic-energy transformers and the main power plant using natural energy, took us two years to assemble, the metals being cast from ores obtained in the mines of this basin, which is rich in practically every metal known to science. Most of it is constructed from plans originally conceived and devised by my father, and later perfected by me. . . . However, I take it you are interested in the storms?"

"Deeply interested. I think I know how you do it, but I'd like confirmation."

Irma shrugged. "Very well. Basically, they are more truly magnetic storms than anything else, but the electrical upheaval they create causes vast winds, lightning and thunder, and torrential deluges due to violent changes in temperature. What actually happens is this: In those two globes up there—anode and cathode, positive and negative respectively—there is built up a fixed potential electron power of about 80,000,000 volts, and the power is derived from the Earth's spin against the ether."

"Then upon discharge of voltage from the spheres there ought to be a vacuum linking them," the Amazon pointed out.

"For ordinary atom smashing and so forth, yes—but this is a different method entirely. High in the roof is magnetic absorption equipment, my father's invention. Into it is drawn the released electrical energy from the globes, free energy produced by the vast collision of opposing forces when the power is released. That power, once it has passed into the magnetic absorption equipment, is transmitted through the main power room to the disseminator tower, which you will have seen. It is the tallest tower in the basin. Next to it is the smaller radio tower transmitter."

"Yes, I've seen them both," the Amazon agreed. "So?"

"Regarding the storms—let me give an example. The sun is constantly throwing off streams of electrons which enter the Earth's atmosphere and under certain conditions bring about electrical storms. In other words, when an area of the atmosphere becomes impregnated with them a positive field is built up which finally discharges to Earth in the form of a violent thunderstorm."

"Elementary physics," the Amazon commented.

"The force directed from the disseminator tower," Irma proceeded, "is also electronic. It can be—and is—guided to any desired spot in the outer world and there sets up a vast positive field in the atmosphere. Guiding electron streams along a predetermined radio-carrier wave presents no real difficulty. Television is much the same thing, except that the electrons are of a different order. So, then, these streams are hurled forth, creating a storm wherever desired—but of a violence and destructiveness unparalleled by anything nature can do because 80,000,000 electron volts form the source of energy, concentrated and not diffused. Intense positive fields are formed in the air at any desired spot. They lean to Earth, and a storm breaks."

"A brilliant and devilish idea," the Amazon breathed. "And from this safe spot in the Antarctic too! But what do you aim to do ultimately? Surely not conquer the Earth through the medium of storms?"

"Why not?" Irma set her mouth. "It can be done. As storm after storm hits civilization it will become more and more paralyzed. People will live in terror of their lives—and in fact are doing already judging from the radio reports I have picked up. At a chosen time, before very long now, my agents in various parts of the world will step in and take control. Then my object will have been accomplished, and against the storms cities have little or no protection and aircraft and space-ships none at all, being controlled basically by electricity."

"You have much of your father's scientific ingenuity, Irma, to say nothing of his lust for power."

Irma laughed shortly. "You, who once tried yourself to rule the world, are hardly the one to tell me that!"

"I realized that you cannot fight the world—as you too will realize in time." Then before the woman could speak the Amazon asked a question. "I am puzzled as to how you shield this valley with negative force. How is it done?"

"I think I'm one ahead of you there," Irma said in cold triumph. "Did you ever hear of the neutrino?"

"Neutrino?" The Amazon reflected. "Why, yes. Theoretically it is a particle with the mass of an electron but which has no electric charge, either positive or negative."

"That's true, only it isn't theoretical. My father isolated the neutrino's part in the atomic set-up of matter. The neutrino exists, and as electrons can be projected, so can neutrinos, but—and this is important—they will not conduct electricity in any form. Instead, they absorb it, and remain neutral."

"You mean that shields of neutrinoic energy, if you can call it that, are protecting this valley?"

"They are—from every form of radiation, be it radio-probes, television-beams, or anything else. The shields are projected from the four towers at the corners of the valley. They are fan-shaped, like a ray from a limelight, and meet in the centre. The only way to get past them is to work from above the valley, but that can only be done by aircraft, and naturally we take care of them."

"Yet when I tested this region on an oscillograph I got a very distinct high-powered electrical reading," the Amazon said, puzzled.

"No doubt. As I told you, the neutrinos absorb the charge. While they are doing that they show in an oscillograph, the same as any other charge. It was absorption which you saw. What did you use?"

"An x-ray telescopic beam."

"That would account for it, being very short wave," Irma said. "As to the cutting out of electrical equipment on planes, that is done by a separate neutrino beam, one of which is on your Ultra at this moment, and will remain on. I knew just where it was, thanks to your aura giving away your position. Those pilots who came were detected by radar and dealt with also by a neutrino beam."

Silence dropped as the two women measured each other again.

"I have arranged," Irma Mueller said, "what I think is something very ingenious—and of course fatal—for you, Amazon. Making you work until exhaustion kills you is useless as far as you are concerned, but just the same I want to destroy you and give you a good deal of anguish of mind before death takes place. So, let me explain. Come here."

The Amazon followed the woman across the laboratory until they were between the giant anode and cathode globes, gazing up at them—and, far above them in the roof, the magnetic absorption plates. Turning, Irma pressed a switch on the wall and from a concealed trap in the room, to one side of the absorption equipment, a small cage-like device appeared, fixed to a strong steel cable. When it reached the floor it stopped its descent.

"This is the inspection cradle," Irma explained. "But of course it can be turned to other uses."

She opened its barred side, then before the Amazon could grasp what was intended she found herself thrust forward into the cradle stumblingly, unable to keep her balance with her chained wrists. Irma shut the side of the cage and snapped the safety lock, tossing the key up and down in her palm.

With a grim smile to herself she went across to the bench and selected a length of strong chain, similar to that pinioning the Amazon's wrists. With a quick movement she threw it round the Amazon's ankles and tugged sharply. With a crash she overbalanced on her back to the floor of the cage and Irma pulled the chain taut, crosswise, and padlocked it to the frame of the cage.

"There you are," she said calmly, as the Amazon lay on the cage floor glaring up at her. "Chained hand and foot, and with the kind of chain which you'll never be able to break. I intend elevating the cage until it is at a point directly between the anode and cathode globes, which means it will also be directly under the magnet absorber. In an hour I shall be releasing a further electronic stream aimed once again at London. As I've explained, to create the storms, a colossal positive-negative voltage flashes from the globes and meets in the centre, after which it is drawn up above. What matters to you is that you will be right in line with the voltage. The cage, and you, will be blasted to ashes. . . . Or had you already grasped that?"

The Amazon said nothing because she realized the uselessness of arguing. Lying on her back she worked hard at her cramped, chained wrists, the links cutting painfully into her flesh, but she could not budge them or her manacles in the slightest.

Irma, still smiling turned away and moved the switch which sent the cage soaring up. Exactly between the two globes, it came to a halt, swinging gently at the end of its cable. The Amazon twisted her head and stared below, in time to see Irma move the control which started the generators and transformers. With a faint hissing sputtering the electrical power drawn from the Earth's own axial spin began to build up in the globes.

"There is only one thing I regret about this," Irma's voice floated up clearly amidst the drone of the machines. "I am compelled to attend to

the power plant in the adjoining laboratory during the release of a storm, so I shall have to leave you—but I shall leave a guard to watch you, so you cannot by any possible way escape me."

CHAPTER XIV

WITH grim eyes the Amazon watched the woman press a summoning button and after a moment or two a guard came in.

"See that she does not move from there," Irma ordered briefly, pointing up. "If she tries, advise me immediately. In 60 minutes I shall be releasing an electronic-storm track. Once the current has passed and destroyed that cage and its occupant you can go. Your duty finishes there."

The guard nodded and settled himself beside the switches, his weapon in his hand and angled up toward the Amazon as she lay on the floor of the swaying, slowly twisting cage.

Irma turned and left the laboratory, vanishing through the connecting doorway. Once she had gone, the Amazon forced her head upwards and stared at her feet, drew up one foot and then the other—but she was facing the same problem as with her wrists. There was no muscular strength, not even hers, which could smash those gleaming, flawlessly forged links—unless some kind of leverage could be obtained. And up here there just wasn't any.

She relaxed again and frowned at the roof far above her, with the magnetic equipment glinting dully. Furiously she tried to think. Sixty minutes, Irma had said. Sixty minutes in which to think of a way out of destruction. Abstractedly her eyes followed the mirror-like spots of light dancing on the magnetic attractor where the reflection of the polished links caught the huge, glaring arcs at the roof corners.

The ghost of an idea twirled through the Amazon's brain and began to take form.

She looked down. The guard was 50 feet beneath, seated in a chair, watching her with no expression on his square face. Carefully she began moving until she had forced her feet up to the low first rail of the cage. This took the reflection of the chain away from the roof and directed it downward. Again she moved, until at last she had the reflections from the links flashing at irregular intervals across the guard's face, a movement created by the cage's gentle swaying.

Now and again the guard passed a hand over his eyes, dazzled by the repeated glintings, but to the Amazon's satisfaction he did not shift position. She lay looking at him steadily, unwaveringly.

It was not often the Amazon turned her extraordinary mind to hypnotism, even though she knew she possessed the power to enslave most wills to her own. Her normal procedure was to rely on her strength and superior cunning. With both of these attributes useless at the moment she played the only card she had left, hurling a persistent mental command across the gap to the watching man, lulling his mind at the same time by the monotonous sweepings of light across his eyes.

Presently he began to feel the effect. He rubbed a hand over his forehead and stared into the dazzling flashes of light and the dim view of the Amazon's face as she lay on the cage floor. He could vaguely see her eyes, looking very dark in a yellow face.

Gradually he found those unwavering eyes absorbing him. They held his attention in spite of himself. The laboratory around him seemed to fade into insignificance. Only the eyes mattered. The eyes . . . There was something he had to do, if only he could get it clear in his mind.

He had to—had to. He frowned bewilderedly, lights and two steady eyes the only recognizable things in his universe. Why yes, of course! Lower the cage! That was it.

He moved mechanically, got up from his chair and walked like an automaton to the cage control switch. Pressing it, he watched absently as the cage came down swiftly to the floor. Somewhere at the back of his slow-moving mind he realized that the blazing of those lights had gone—but those two eyes were still there, much nearer now, deep purple irises with wide black pupils.

Gradually he became aware of something else he had to do. Get the electric welding gun! Of course! Melt the chains which were holding this woman. He had the idea somehow that he ought not to do this, but since it did not in any way appear to contravene the law of self-preservation—which realm, the Amazon well knew, no hypnotism could invade—he did as ordered, picking up the self-contained welding gun from its stand and coming back to the cage with it.

Still working under the iron compulsion of the girl's will he switched the gun on and directed the searing, soundless beam of fire at the chain about her ankles. She set her teeth, wondering if he would misdirect the fire and burn her feet and legs instead. Under such tension of fear she found it hard to keep her mind fixed on him—but somehow she succeeded in remaining mistress of the situation. Within a few seconds the chain was melted through and she drew her feet away sharply.

The manacles and taut chain between her wrists she did not trust to the searing pencil of the welding gun. Instead, she willed the guard back into his chair—after he had returned the welding gun to its stand—and then moved to the electric vise. Fitting a link of the chain into the jaws, she stood with her back to it and pushed the control button with her hip. The jaws snapped shut and immovable on the link.

With it held in this manner she was able to gain the necessary leverage, bending the link back and forth with all her strength until finally, though though it was, the metal fractured under the strain and snapped. Instantly she whisked her hands in front of her and, working carefully with the welding gun on its smallest power, smelted open the locks of each three-inch-wide manacle.

So intently had she been concentrating on ridding herself of the last of her bonds, she had forgotten to concentrate on the guard. Just in time she saw him recovering and levelling his weapon, his eyes narrowed as he realized what had happened. Immediately the Amazon whirled up the welding gun and flung it at him. It hit him in the chest and knocked him sideways out of the chair, his weapon exploding in soundless fire. Before he could get to his feet the Amazon was upon him, her forearm under his chin and her knee in the small of his back. He gasped and struggled frantically, but there was nothing he could do to dislodge the powerful grip—and the Amazon maintained it until finally he sagged helplessly and became unconscious.

She glanced from him to the closed door of the adjoining power room, and then she looked at the clock. Forty-five of the stipulated 60 minutes had already passed. Slowly a smile came to her lips as she reached a decision. Hauling the unconscious guard on to her shoulder, she carried him to the cage and dropped him inside it to the floor. Then from the bench she took the manacles and lengths of chain and dropped them in on top of him. A push on the control button sent the cage whirling up to its former point between the globes. This done, the Amazon glided silently to the shelter of a big bank of insulators and hid behind them to await events.

Inexorably the seconds sliced off the electric clock and the drone of the generators continued steadily as, presumably, Irma Meulier remained at her control post in the adjoining master power room. Up in the gently swinging cage the guard remained unconscious, his nervous system temporarily paralyzed.

Then suddenly—chaos! Man-made lightning blazed and crackled from globe to globe, or appeared to. In actual fact it came from both globes simultaneously and met in the centre. The Amazon watched in fascination as blinding lavender filigrees of energy crackled in the gap, hardly impeded for a split second by the swinging cage. In one mighty flash it and the man inside it vanished, leaving a twisted steel cable with its strands unplaiting slowly and curling upward. For perhaps five minutes the hurtling of energy bolts continued, taking an obviously deflected path to the magnetic attractors in the roof, the air becoming drenched in ozone. The static resistance set the Amazon's hair bristling at the roots as she crouched, and waited.

Then, finally, the upheaval subsided. The cage had utterly disappeared. The distant door of the power room opened after a while and Irma Mueller came in, hurrying to the spot between the two globes and staring up at the broken cable.

With her eyes narrowed, the Amazon watched silently, but she did not act. It was no part of her plan to allow herself to be seen just yet. Irma turned about and switched off the generators, then she glanced at the empty chair where the guard had been left on duty. To his disappearance she obviously attached no importance since she had told him to leave once his job had been accomplished.

Manifestly well satisfied with events, Irma left the laboratory by the main door, evidently heading for her own quarters in the building. The Amazon waited for a moment or two and then glided out of her concealment and hurried to the power room.

There was nobody in sight. The central power plant, presumably the heart of the sub-polar basin's electrical power, as well as the creator of the deadly electron streams which were wrecking the outer world, was working in a silent excess of power deep within a transparent hemisphere. In orderly rows on either side of it, separated by a metal aisle, were slave machines, each one alternating with complicated switch panels.

Musing, the Amazon reached the master-control chair—which no doubt Irma had only recently vacated—and settled herself to consider the plant. She first tested the domed cover and satisfied herself that to all normal attacks it was unbreakable. Though it was transparent she realized from its composition that it was made of interlocked atoms of matter and because of that only one thing could smash it: atomic power, sheer and concentrated such as she had in her atom-gun on the Ultra—and nowhere else.

The thought sobered her. Somehow she had got to get her atom-gun from the vessel and return here with it to destroy the plant. Once it was destroyed it would take years to rebuild it.

With its annihilation, the power holding down the Ultra, protecting the basin in negative energy, and above all hurling disaster into the outer world, would cease. But between wishing this to happen and accomplishing it a great and dangerous gulf loomed. And Ethel had to be rescued.

CHAPTER XV

THE Amazon left the power room by a window and dropped lightly into the alley outside. Then she found her way to the still gaping grid through which she, Ethel and Rufus had emerged some hours before.

She lowered herself through the opening, went down the ladder, and through the tunnel to the smelting room.

For a time she remained with her back flattened against the tunnel wall, studying the room—then she caught a fleeting glimpse of Ethel at the far side of the big place, toiling with the task of loading a truck with ore.

The Amazon glided out of concealment and was swallowed up among the workers. By performing odd jobs on the way as she went, she worked her way round until she reached the corner where Ethel was toiling. Quietly she moved to her side and stooped with her to shovel ore.

"Aunt Vi!" Ethel gasped hoarsely, and raised an astonished face.

"Be careful," the Amazon breathed. "Talk as you work. I got free and Irma Mueller thinks I'm dead. I want to preserve that illusion as long as I can."

Ethel nodded and went on silently with her task. Meantime the Amazon glanced about her, particularly when the truck—which ran on narrow-gauge rails—was filled with ore. A set-faced, bony slave then took it over, standing on the small platform at the back and operating an electric motor. It moved off along the rails, and the Amazon said: "Where does this ore go?"

Ethel shook her head. "No idea . . ." And she turned wearily as an empty truck came up to be filled.

"Seen Rufus anywhere?" The Amazon looked about her as she spoke.

"Yes. He's at his former job of girder moving; I saw him a little while ago—" Ethel pointed as the crowd of workers thinned for a moment. "There he is—over there."

The Amazon looked, caught sight of him. Her eyes strayed to a nearby crane with the driver high up in the control cabin. Then she looked at the truck Ethel was filling with ore.

"Get in," she murmured—and Ethel stared in surprise.

"What? In the truck?"

"Yes. It's the only way you can get out of here without being seen; daren't use the same tunnel as before. Too risky. I'll shovel ore in on top of you so you won't be visible. When the truck stops, get out and hide somewhere. I'll find you by trailing the line. I've got to get Rufus somehow, because he may know where I can find an airplane. I've got to have one in order to reach the Ultra as quickly as possible. Hurry up. Get in."



Ethel obeyed the injunction. She did it so quickly that the move was not noticed and the Amazon promptly set to work to shovel ore in on top of her as she lay crouched in the base of the truck. Since the ore was fairly large and irregularly shaped, she had plenty of chance to breathe.

The task finished and no sign yet of the slave who would drive the truck away, the Amazon threw aside the shovel and made her way swiftly and unnoticed amidst the workers until she reached the crane. As she had expected, its central column—on top of which was perched the control cabin—was hollow inside with a ladder leading up it. She dodged inside the central column trap before anybody noticed her and climbed the ladder swiftly until she came to the opening in the control cabin floor.

The crane driver sat at his post, staring out gloomily over the busy scene. Without a sound the Amazon drew herself up, moved up behind him and dragged him over the back of his chair. Her hand clamped hard over his mouth as he started to cry out.

"Sorry to do this, but I must," she murmured, and her left fist struck hard to the side of his jaw. His eyes rolled upwards and he sagged in her grasp, knocked out.

Moving him to one side, she borrowed his cap and tucked up her conspicuous blonde hair inside it. Her black suit, she realized, would not be noticed as different from the driver's overalls. Then she sat in the driving seat and looked at the unaccustomed controls. To her satisfaction most of them were clearly marked so she had little difficulty in determining which was which.

This matter settled, she gazed down and finally singled out Rufus. He was in a little area by himself, which was just as she wanted it. Then her eyes moved to the truck where Ethel lay. It was still standing there. Nobody had come to attend to it, but in the distance an overseer seemed to be considering the wisdom of going over to investigate. And suddenly he made up his mind to do so, whip in hand.

The Amazon switched on the power of the crane and set it moving on juggernaut tractors, the workers below fleeing out of its way as they saw it moving toward them. The overlooker also saw it coming, and hesitated, staring in puzzled anger. The Amazon pulled the level which controlled the giant hook at the end of the chain. A thin cable wound up on its drum and



"Climbing to that height might make you dizzy," the Amazon told her. "If anybody should come while I'm gone, use this."

drew the hook backward. Gently the Amazon angled the giant arm until it was in line with the overseer—then she snapped off the ratchet which held back the chain hook-wire. Immediately the hook swung down and out. The overseer saw it coming but he was too late. The 400-pound mass of solid iron struck him on the head, killing him.

She swung the chain back and below her, and realizing what had happened, Rufus waved frantically. No longer concerned with the problem of concealing her identity, she threw away the greasy cap from her head and yelled at Rufus through megaphoned hands.

"Grab the hook and leave the rest to me!"

He nodded and seized the hook as it swung in his direction. As he clung to it tightly, the Amazon swung the arms round slowly and moved the crane forward until the worker was over the ore truck.

"Drop carefully!" the Amazon yelled. "Ethel's underneath that ore!"

Rufus lowered himself down and landed as lightly as he could. The unevenness made him stumble and catch hold of the edge of the truck to maintain his balance—but he also did something else. He caught the release button on the control motor and the truck started forward swiftly along its rails—at a far greater speed than normal, careering swiftly toward the distant tunnel opening as workers stumbled out of its way.

In dismay the Amazon stared after it, her last view of it being of Rufus struggling desperately to find a way to stop it. Then it vanished in the blackness of the tunnel mouth. The Amazon looked about her sharply and caught sight of another truck in the distance, presumably the one intended to take the place of the departed. Quickly she drove the crane across to it, switched off the power, then dived to the ladder and stumbled pell-mell down it.

As she emerged another overseer came into view and blocked her path. A sweep of her arm knocked him flying out of the way, and two workers who impeded her progress were also whirled aside. She gained the truck, jumped on the back and pressed the release button, swinging the speed lever to maximum. The motor, to her scientific mind, was simplicity itself, as was its control—but manifestly to the medieval mind of Rufus it was a complete puzzle.

The Amazon hurtled the truck across the smelting room and into the tunnel, extracting from it all the speed it possessed. The thing that haunted her most was where the trucks ended their journey.

Suddenly the truck came into view beneath the string of electric lights set in the tunnel roof. It was travelling along the rails at a good 30 miles an hour. The tunnel was so narrow that there was just room between the smoothly cut walls to allow it to pass. Certainly it would be impossible to jump off sideways.

The Amazon kept the pointer on her own truck to maximum and the gap between herself and the runaway began to narrow—until finally she cut off the power on her own truck, allowing it to coast down the slight incline. Quickly she scrambled over to the front, then when the gap had narrowed sufficiently she leaped, landing beside Rufus as he still tried to check the motor.

The Amazon seized the brake switch—or at least she intended to do so. Instead her hand met a hole in the metal.

"Where's the brake switch?" she yelled, above the din hurled back in the confined space.

"It broke!" Rufus panted. "I wast wrenching at it and it gave way—"

"You idiot!" the Amazon screamed at him. "Now we can't stop the thing!"

The truck took a sudden left turn and began to gather tremendous impetus as the incline steepened. In the rear the following truck, entirely uncontrolled and without its brakes on, came speeding after them—but it was too far away to risk jumping to it.

Suddenly the ore moved and Ethel's head and shoulder poked up. She stared about her, at the lights flashing past overhead, at the steeply descending track—then at the Amazon.

"What's happened?" she asked in horror.

"We're on a runaway," the Amazon panted. "We can't jump sideway because there isn't room. We can't jump to the other truck behind—and if we drop off this one the following one would cut us in pieces before we could lie flat in the track and let it go over us—"

"Look!" Ethel screamed, pointing ahead.

Nearly overturning at its high speed, the truck had now swung round a corner and ahead—half a mile, perhaps—loomed the molten red glare of a gigantic furnace cauldron. Smoke was rising from it as it lay just below the dip out of sight.

"'Tis a refinery furnace of huge size!" Rufus exclaimed. "I hath known for some time that they existed. Usually these trucks goeth slowly at the end of the track, tip their ores into yonder cauldron, and then art taken round a bend to a fresh track and driven back to the smelting room. For long enough most of us hath known that smelting ist done on a mass scale—"

"Yes, volcanically!" the Amazon snapped. "That is probably a natural crater, white hot, which, handled properly, smelts the ores to liquid and saves a lot of man-manufactured power."

"Who cares what it is?" Ethel shrieked, her eyes dilated. "We're going to be flung right into it!"

"We've one chance," the Amazon said. "It's a desperate one, too, but we'll have to risk it. You see that huge bracing girder going across the top of the crater? It's probably there to keep the walls from crumbling inward under incessant heat. We'll try to reach it by split-second timing—"

"But we can never jump that far!" Ethel protested.

"I cannot, certainly," Rufus declared.

"Stand up as well as you can, both of you," the Amazon ordered. "Both of you lock your arms round my waist—tightly. And don't let go if you value your lives. That's it. Leave my arms free . . . Now, hang on!"

She half crouched, waiting, every muscle taut—then at the identical second as the truck hit the buffer bar at the end of the track, she leaped, hurled forward also by the truck's sudden overturning and nosediving into the raging molten depths 50 feet below.

CHAPTER XVI

WITH every ounce of her stupendous strength she sprang upward, her hands outflung to the limit. Ethel and Rufus clinging to her. Her fingers struck the edge of the giant girder, but her left hand slipped. She twisted round, swinging only by her right hand.

She felt her fingers sliding slowly on the wetness caused by steam condensation. Below she saw workers in asbestos suits and carrying long ladles. They were staring up, their heads hidden by hoods and transparent masks.

With a vast effort she forced her body to swing round again and got her left hand into position.

"Climb up!" she panted. "You first, Rufus— Quick! Use me as a ladder—but hurry!"

Rufus obeyed and fought his way up to the girder and, relieved of his weight, the Amazon breathed more freely.

"You next," she told Ethel, and with Rufus helping her from above, she succeeded. Then and only then did the Amazon muscle herself up and swing on to the broad girder.

Still with the light of desperate fear in their eyes, Rufus and Ethel stared down into the cauldron.

"We only—just missed," Ethel muttered. "But for you, Aunt Vi, we'd be dead now."

"A miss," the Amazon told her dryly, "is as good as a mile, if the old cliche is to be believed. . . . And we've no time to waste here in gazing round the scenery. We've got to move before we're recaptured. Our escape is not exactly a secret any longer, don't forget."

She twisted round on the girder and stood up, balancing as straight as a young goddess and considering the appalling view below. Then with a shrug of her shoulders she began walking along the girder with perfect assurance, leaving Ethel and Rufus to follow behind her, clinging tightly to the girder edges with their fingers and moving on their knees. When the Amazon reached the end of the girder, where it was imbedded in the rock of the crater face, she stood and waited.

"Feeling any safer?" she inquired, when they finally reached her side and stood up. Then she said to Rufus:

"Can we escape into the outer world from this point?"

He looked about him and finally nodded.

"It shouldst be possible," he agreed. "This underworld ist riddled with volcanic shafts. All of them, this one included, leadeth out finally to extinct blowholes in the open."

"That's all we need," the Amazon commented. "We'd better follow this path along the crater face and see where it takes us."

It led them into one of the inevitable tunnels—a natural one and completely dark, but with a distinct warm wind blowing down it which proved it had a connection with the open air.

Sooner than they had dared hope, they came to the tunnel's end—a blow-hole a quarter of a mile beyond the town.

Ethel said: "Did you say that you have to get to the Ultra, Aunt Vi, if you can find an airplane?"

"Yes—chiefly because there is no other way to get to the Ultra, and get my atom-gun," the Amazon explained. "The big one I use for attack or defence. It's the only instrument which will destroy the main power plant Irma Mueller uses. With that in ruins she can't do a thing. For that purpose we came here and we're going to finish the job. We shall need your help, Rufus, which is one reason why I rescued you. Is there [illegible] where I can get hold of an [illegible]"

"Dost thou mean a bird—which maketh [illegible] noise and flieth fast?"

"Yes—it." The Amazon controlled her impatience.

"There is one—mayhap more—in one of the [illegible]," he said. "Oft I have seen them there—"

"That must be what they're using as an airport," the Amazon interrupted. "That's all I want to know. You can take us to it?"

"Yea, but— 'Tis guarded," Rufus warned, looking troubled. "Many of the Controller's men, heavily armed."

"We'll deal with that when we come to it," the Amazon said. "Show us the way and we'll see what we can do."

Rufus nodded, and began to walk through the gloom toward the lights of the town.

Half an hour later they reached the natural park within the town where, clearly visible in the area trained upon them, were three average-sized airplanes of the very latest European make. In the first instance they had probably been used to carry materials and men from the outer world.

"Very nice," the Amazon commented, weighing up the situation. "And I think we may take it for granted that they will be kept up, otherwise they would probably be under cover. They are there for instant take-off, perhaps—from one part of the valley to another."

"To escort the guards," Rufus muttered [illegible]. "Look!"

He [illegible] four uniformed men standing in a group, talking idly. At their hips the butts projecting from their holsters were their vicious flame-guns. The Amazon contemplated them for a while, and then turned to Ethel.

"You and Rufus make for that plane nearest to us," she ordered. "I'll distract the guards' attention. And move fast."

The two nodded and began to move in a wide detour, and the moment they came into the radius of light, they were seen.

One of the guards straightened up and pointed, then his hand flew to his gun—but before he had the opportunity to pull it forth from the holster a battering ram struck him in the side of the jaw and he ceased, temporarily anyway, to take any interest in the proceedings.

Completely confused by the black-garbed, golden-headed girl who had suddenly descended in their midst, the remaining three guards muffed most of their actions. They tried to drag out their guns, but found the weapons whipped from their hands as fast as they did so. The speed and tigerish ferocity of the Golden Amazon was something they had never experienced before.

The second man went down, felled by the butt of his own gun. Without bothering to argue further the Amazon swung the gun on the two remaining men and jabbed the button. The livid pencil of fire slashed across both of them and they dropped, a burned line across their chests showing where the fire had struck.

The weapon gripped firmly in her right hand, the Amazon started to run across the interventing space, reaching the plane as she found Rufus and Ethel struggling futilely with the door.

"It's locked!" Ethel panted. "Can't budge it . . ."

The Amazon tugged at it and then brought the butt of the gun down savagely on the framework—four times before the lock snapped and the door swung inward. She jumped through the opening quickly and whirled Ethel up after her. Rufus made to follow, then he gasped hoarsely and with a look of dumb amazement and anguish on his face fell back and collapsed.

"Rufus! He's shot . . .!" Ethel cried.

The Amazon twirled, just in time to see Rufus fall, manifestly dead to judge from the burned line across his back. Speeding across the plane park was one of the guards, who had evidently recovered from his knockout. His gun blazed a further livid pencil of fire and it struck the plane. With narrowed eyes the Amazon took aim—and pressed the button. Lavender fire jetted from the gun muzzle and the guard dropped.

"Can't do any more for Rufus," the Amazon said, jamming the door as best she could, with its broken lock. "We've ourselves to look after."

The cold logic of her observation was quite apparent to Ethel, so she said no more. Instead she settled in the seat beside the Amazon as she quickly familiarized herself with the controls.

"Plenty of fuel," she said, glancing at the gauge. "That's the main thing."

She pressed the starter-button and the small, powerful propeller immediately started up. To send the machine up from the airfield and into the dark was only the work of moments. Once she had the lights of the town behind her and had passed beyond the range of the four towers—by climbing high over the invisible wall they formed by their radiations—she switched on the headlights affixed to the wings and directed them towards the range.

"So far, so good," she murmured. "Now we . . ."

"Don't you think, Amazon, that you are taking a terrible lot for granted?"

The Amazon and Ethel turned their heads sharply and looked at the radio loudspeaker above the control panel. Evidently it was on a permanently open circuit and picked up voices as well as received them.

"Irma Mueller!" Ethel ejaculated, startled.

CHAPTER XVII

"QUITE right, Miss Wilson," the soft voice agreed. "And, Amazon, I must congratulate you on your extraordinary efforts to escape, but you can't. Naturally I can pick up your position quite easily with the aura compass and I know where you are at this moment. I could, with ease, cut out the electrical circuit of your plane motor—but I think there is a better way. You are, of course, something of a space explorer. In fact you both are?"

The Amazon looked about her for a microphone with which to send a reply but failed to find one, so as she flew on towards the mountain range she was compelled to sit and listen. Presently Irma's voice resumed:

"I'll tell you what I am going to do. I have some potential stored up in readiness for a further storm attack on the outer world, but at the moment it has better uses. I shall project it from the disseminator tower as a force beam so that it will encompass your plane and drive it upward and before it. You will be utterly unable to stop the machine travelling at a prodigious speed beyond the limits of the atmosphere. In fact you will travel outwards for two hundred miles, at which distance the beam will cease to be effective. You will then drop back through the airless void, drawn by the earth's gravity, and will finally crash. I need hardly add that the impact will be devastating, that is if you are still in a fit condition to experience it. The heating in the plane is hardly calculated to stand up to void-cold, and that cabin is not sealed. In a way, perhaps the plan is quite poetic. You both like exploring space: what more fitting than that you should die in it?"

The voice stopped and Ethel gripped the Amazon's arm.

"We can't let her get away with it, Aunt Vi. We've got to land quickly . . ."

"It is too late for that," Irma commented. "I am releasing the power this very moment, and like all radiations it moves at the speed of light."

Her voice had hardly ceased before the lights of the town behind and below were suddenly swamped in the intolerable effulgence which burst forth from the disseminator tower. Though the actual force-beam itself was invisible—as were the electron streams when generated—the static effects accompanying it were bewilderingly beautiful. Lilacs, yellows, browns, and deep mauves transformed the night sky, and the mountain range loomed ahead now in an irradiance of colors.

At the same instant the outwardly travelling power beam hit the plane with such force that both the Amazon and Ethel were half flung out of their seats. The plane's own power failed to mean anything any more. The machine was in an alien grip, hurtling upward diagonally with the craggy face of the mountain range only a quarter of a mile away from it.

The Amazon leaned close to Ethel and spoke in a whisper which the concealed microphone would not be able to detect.

"Have a look round for parachutes: it's our only hope. If we get flung into outer space we'll be finished—for two reasons. That door isn't secure and our air will seep out into the vacuum; and on the other hand even if we survived that a crash from the airless heights would smash us to powder . . . there ought to be parachutes somewhere."

They both blundered about the cabin in a frantic search. Ethel was the first to come upon three parachutes, folded and stacked in a corner. Just in time she remembered not to speak and instead motioned excitedly to them. The Amazon gave a quick nod and they hurried into the harnesses.

"I'll go first," the Amazon murmured, and wrenched open the cabin door.

For a moment she gasped at the deadly cold of the air at these heights, then without hesitating a second longer she jumped. Because there was no alternative Ethel followed suit and they both pulled at their rip-cords after the prescribed interval and jerked from headlong falling into an upright position.

To Ethel, the worst part of the descent was not the aimless drifting but the utter polar darkness, the sliding awesome crags of ice and snow to one side of her, and the biting wind which stabbed through her flimsy clothes and into her very bones.

To control the drifting in any way was impossible, and at length they struck a spreading ice field and slid for a distance pulled by the billowing parachutes. After a struggle they got themselves free of the harnesses and stood watching the ballooning silks blowing away in the screaming wind into the dark.

"I'm frozen," Ethel whispered, hugging herself. "We've got to find some shelter somewhere."

"The alternative is to keep moving and keep circulation going," the Amazon answered. She glanced about her, selected the least difficult stretch of the glacier, and nodded towards it. "We'd better take that way. The Ultra's in that direction."

"How'd you know?" Ethel asked, staring into the dark.

"By that crater there." The Amazon indicated a distant red glow high in the mountain range. "It was on our left as the Ultra fell. I noticed that particularly, so it must be on our right from here. Come on."

Fortunately for them they were still wearing the spiked boots they had donned at the outset of their adventures, so what would otherwise have been an impossible climb was now rendered just tolerable.

The Amazon hardly noticed the cold, but on Ethel, a normal woman, the effect was one of slow paralysis. Halfway across the glacial field she collapsed, heavy in the sleep which precedes death from extreme cold.

"Wake up, Rosy!" the Amazon snapped, hitting her sharply across the face. "You've got to keep moving."

She hauled the girl to her feet and hit her again—but it was wasted effort. Ethel's energies were played out. The Amazon picked her up, put her over her shoulder and went on steadily.

Here, to her surprise, bare rock was showing. Bare rock at this altitude with ice everywhere else? Indeed though she could not be absolutely certain of it, the air about her seemed to be warmer.

Resolutely she kept on going, picking her way through gigantic boulders and spurs, and the further she went the less biting became the wind, until, as she rounded a bend, she came unexpectedly upon an area spouting steam geysers into the darkness. A low murmur of thankfulness escaped her.

Presently she stumbled upon a steam outlet from the volcanic range—a little oasis in a frigid wilderness, a small-scale version of the giant basin lying in the mountain foothills.

Gently she laid Ethel down on the warm, damp ground and set to work to revive her. With the warmth it was not such a difficult task.

She said: "The only thing for me to do now is to try to locate the Ultra while you stay here and keep warm. I shan't be long: the Ultra can't be far away."

Ethel gave a vehement shake of her dark head. "I'd sooner die in the cold, aunt, than be separated from you."

"As you wish." The Amazon contemplated the steam jets for a while, a thought passing through her mind. Turning, she looked at a further plume of steam, a really gigantic one, jetting out of the mountain face. "There must be a hot river under here somewhere," she said. "Hidden behind the mountain face . . . And that," she finished, "is very interesting."

Whatever thought was in her mind she did not express it fully. Instead she helped Ethel up.

They progressed for perhaps half a mile in the searingly cold wind, passing frozen and thawed areas at intervals, when the Amazon paused abruptly and pointed.

"There it is!"

Ethel looked, following the Amazon's pointing finger downwards. All she could see through wind-misted eyes was a spreading white glacier below shining under the stars—but after a moment or two her vision cleared a little and a black speck marring the white became clear to her.

"Sure it isn't a rock," she questioned.

"It's the Ultra." The Amazon was quite convinced. "I can see in the dark better than you can, remember. I can see the gouge tracks it made in the ice when it slipped. No, it isn't a rock: it's the ship all right, and thank heaven we've found it."

But to see the Ultra and to reach it were two different things. It necessitated negotiating dangerous rocks, sliding down glassy pathways, and at times leaping crevasses with no certainty that solidity lay on the other side. In each case the Amazon went first to make sure, and the luck held. Ultimately they reached the wide ice-table on which the Ultra stood.

Ethel, only moving mechanically, but saved from frostbite and collapse by the extreme exertions which had been necessary, pushed the airlock door inwards and staggered into the dark control room. The Amazon followed her in, closed the door against the freezing wind and switched the heating-button on and off. To her exasperation, the current was still useless.

"Here we are for the time being," she said, "and here we stay. At least we can get into warm clothes. We'll have a meal, a long rest, and then . . ."

She stopped and smiled gravely. Ethel had fallen fast asleep.

CHAPTER XVIII

WHEN Ethel awoke again it was to discover that 36 hours had passed, that she was warm and covered in furs, while near to her lounging in a chair was the Amazon.

"Better?" the Amazon questioned, getting up. "Here's some food and restorative. I thought I'd let you have your sleep out."

The girl took the tabloid concentrates and glass of essence handed to her, remaining silent until she had disposed of them. Then she said:

"Whatever we may plan to do now I'm ready for it. I've got my strength back and as far as I can tell I'm none the worse."

"You're perfectly all right," the Amazon assured her. "I examined you while you were asleep and gave you a couple of injections to prevent any chance of illness. Soon as you're ready we'll return to the valley—with this."

She nodded to the massive self-powered—by spark ignition—atomic gun which, while Ethel had slept, she had unscrewed from its gimbal stand. It now stood by the wall, its ends linked by a length of strong chain so it could be carried across the back.

"With that," the Amazon said, "I can smash the power plant, if I can get near enough. The only thing that constantly worries me is the fact that my aura is detectable by Irma. That means I am never safe from attack no matter how much I try to hide. However, I'm going on—to the bitter end."

"And carry that!" Ethel ejaculated, staring. "But it must weigh about 300 pounds!"

"It does, but that doesn't concern me." The Amazon got to her feet and picked up the polar fur equipment she had set out, together with ropes, provisions, and various accoutrements. "As soon as you're ready we'll be moving," she added. "And this time I hope we may find the Ultra with less difficulty when the time comes for us to return. Though the electricity is not working, I have switched in the current for the prow plates. That means that when the negative beam is cut off the front of the vessel will be electrified and we'll be able to detect it—with this . . ."

She held up her wrist to which was strapped a detector compass, and Ethel nodded. She got up from the wall couch, and after washing and redressing herself, donned the furs. At length she and the Amazon stepped out into the fiendish wind to commence for the second time their journey toward the town in the valley.

When they came to warm regions again, they took off their fur suits and carried them on their backs.

"The first thing we have to do," the Amazon said as they approached the town, "is find out the whereabouts of Irma Mueller. I have a gadget with me which will enable us to hear anything she may say even if we don't get near enough to see her."

From her duplicate belt of instruments the Amazon produced a flat disc, thin as paper, with two sets of slender wires attached to it, ending in tiny cup-like earphones. She explained: "It can lie flat under a door or in any minute space and never be detected, yet it picks up every sound."

By utilizing the low-eaved house shadows to conceal them, they covered the length of the main street and arrived at the building where Irma Mueller had her headquarters. On the steps stood the guards—four of them, two on each side of the entrance.

"You don't propose tackling them, armed as they are, do you?" Ethel asked anxiously.

"No. Not while I have my proton gun." The Amazon took it from her belt, adjusted the range of the barrel by moving a switch, and then dropped on one knee to take aim. The moment she pressed the firing button a thin needle-like jet of violet fire leaped across the street and struck the guard on the extreme right in the chest. Without a sound he fell on his face down the steps and remained motionless.

Immediately his three comrades swung round, startled, and dived to help him—only to crumple also as the violet jet seared them. Slowly the Amazon put the frightful weapon back in her belt and smiled faintly.

"So far, so good," she murmured. "This is no time for arguing, Rosy. Now we can get into the building. Come on."

With Ethel beside her she glided across the street and entered the building silently. There were no other guards in sight.

"First turn on the right, as I remember it," the Amazon murmured, and turned at the first right-angled passage to which they came—and walked straight into a guard.

The Amazon thought far more swiftly than he did, however, and her fist came up as his hand went to his gun. His head jerked back and his knees gave way. With a gasping sound he sprawled on the floor.

"That's the door of Irma's private room—there." Ethel murmured, stepping over him and pointing. "Or at any rate it's where we were taken."

They moved to it and stood listening. From behind the door came voices, low and indistinct. The Amazon pulled forth her disc-microphone and slipped the wafer-thin circle of metal under the door, plugging one set of leads in her ears and handing the other set to Ethel.

"And, of course, since we have everything needful," Irma Mueller was saying, "it would be pointless to waste any more time. The latest reports show that the outer world is utterly disorganized, following the latest storms we have sent forth. Entire countries are in a state of flux and ready for taking over. That being so, there is no reason why we can't release a final storm of very wide dispersal and then have our agents assume power pending our arrival."

"Excellent," agreed a man's voice. "I only hope you haven't forgotten that we have an enemy in our midst."

"The Golden Amazon?" Irma laughed contemptuously. "An extremely overrated woman, my friend."

"I wish I could share your optimism. She's clever, ingenious, and ruthless. She—"

"Suppose you let me look after her," Irma snapped. "I am in control, not you. . . . Now, to my plans. I intend by radio to our various outer-world agents within the next few minutes and to ask them to take over after the next storm. Once that is done the potential voltage can be built up and . . ."

The voice ceased as the Amazon withdrew the microphone and returned the outfit to her belt.

"It looks as if we've got to act fast," Ethel whispered urgently. "What are you going to do—wreck her power plant?"

"Later. There's a more important job to be done first. I have to destroy her chances of sending a radio message to the outer world. That smaller tower is responsible for all radio-transmission and reception. I'm going to try to destroy the top of it with this atom gun."

They made their way back down the corridor again, and evidently the death of the four guards on the entrance steps—and the k.o.'d guard in the corridor—had not yet been discovered, for the

re no other guards in sight. Unmo-ted the two women passed to the out-ors.

Finally they reached the open space here the two towers, the one big and e other smaller, loomed.

"That smaller one is 300 feet," Ethel d, staring up at it. "We're not going enjoy climbing it."

"You're not coming," the Amazon told r, unslinging the fur kit from her ck and tossing it down. "You're stay-here while I go up. I can't afford y delay, and climbing to that height ght make you dizzy. If anybody ould come while I'm gone, use this."

The Amazon pulled the proton-gun m her belt and handed it to the girl; n she looked about her. Apparently re was nobody on the watch. Satis-d, she sped lithely across the open ce and reached the base of the aller tower, grasped the lowest gir-s and swiftly muscled herself up il she reached the central ladder ending in a spiral.

s swiftly as she could she climbed—wearisome, giddying task, with the rn spread out in ever-increasing re-iteness as she mounted. Higher and her still, and the broad summit med as though it would never come nearer as it lay blacking out the tily winking stars.

ard though the ascent was, particu-y carrying the heavy gun on her k, the Amazon completed the task lly and scrambled up on to the tform encircling the summit. It had w, strong rail round it, while in the tre there was a huge frame-aerial feet high and perhaps 20 broad. ched to a complicated sealed en-ure choked with all manner of es, terminals, and tubes.

aving summed the position up and lizing that she was again dealing unbreakable casing, the Amazon hained the atom-gun from her ulders, set it up carefully on its ng collapsible stand and then usted the firing mechanism to its rowest aperture, otherwise, as she knew, the recoil alone would k her over the rail and to certain th.

he instant the atomic stream struck frame aerial and equipment beneath. e was a sizzling roar, like a white-poker dropping into water. Simul-ously a back-wind lifted the zon up helplessly, wrenched her h the atom-gun and flung her over rail. She managed to cling to it one desperate hand while the scape about her was drenched from to end in the brilliant violet-white tomic fire.

hen there was nothing but smoke the smouldering bars of metal re the radio equipment had been. polar night clamped down again the lights below were unchanged he Amazon twisted in space and d hold of the rail with her other . Slowly she fought her way up he platform again and picked up atomic gun from where the blast nearly hurled it from the platform. adily she looked below her. As as she could tell there were no as yet that her activities had seen, though she knew there was y possibility that they had . . .

e stood the atomic-gun up again s stand and focused the sights on not too distant disseminator tower, sting the firing aperture again so deadly blast would traverse the sary distance. But before she press the switch an amplified reached her from the dark void w, the voice of Irma Mueller.

ome down from there, Amazon, if want Ethel Wilson to go on living. e her covered. It's up to you."

CHAPTER XIX

HE Amazon hesitated, set her mouth, and then stared over the rail into the darkness. She could not detect anything on the d far below. Cupping her hands alled.

hel, is that true?"

s, it's true," a voice faintly replied. hen there's only the wrecking of power plant for it," the Amazon red, and heaving up the atomic she chained it across her shoulders and began to descend the ladder. risk the life of Ethel by destroying sseminator tower, even though the rtunity was in her hands, was thing she dared not do, not while nce remained to escape from the with mission accomplished. Nor was there any doubt but what Irma would carry out her threat if necessary.

As she descended the Amazon pulled out a second protonic gun but she had no chance to use it. When she came to ground level she found Ethel in the forefront of a group of guards, among whom was Irma herself. To deal with the enemy and avoid hitting Ethel was impossible.

"Interesting to know there are times when you use common sense, Amazon," Irma commented. "Relieve her of that belt and the gun on her shoulders," she snapped to the guards, and they obeyed.

Bereft of every weapon, her hands slightly raised, the Amazon waited. Her eyes moved to Ethel.

"What happened?" she asked. "I gave you a gun to protect yourself, didn't I?"

"Yes, but I didn't have a chance to use it. After that atomic glare gave things away I was sneaked up on from behind. I couldn't do a thing."

"Of course," Irma said, lounging forward, "it serves me right for not keeping better track of you. If it's any consolation to you you've ruined my radio apparatus—and no other radio system will do because it had to be specially constructed to defeat the static set up by the Aurora Australis in this part of the world." Irma's hand came up suddenly and slapped the Amazon across the face. "Somehow you must have known it was important that I use that radio. How? Tell me that!"

The Amazon shook her head. "I'm not telling you anything—either now or at any other time."

"This probably explains it," one of the guards said, and from the belt he had taken from about the Amazon's waist he held up the disc-microphone apparatus. Irma's eyes narrowed as she looked at it.

"So that's it! That accounts for that stunned guard in the corridor leading to my headquarters, and the four dead guards on the steps. . . . Bring them along!" she ordered, and began walking in the direction of her headquarters. . . .

They were in the laboratory, the Amazon with her wrists chained behind her and the guards dismissed before Irma spoke again.

"Without doubt," Irma said, "you have a singular ability for sliding out of tight corners, Miss Brant. However, my idea of trying to drive you into space—to fall back to destruction—at least was a good idea even if it didn't succeed."

The Amazon shrugged and leaned back against the bench, watching the woman intently. Every time she turned away and pondered the Amazon moved her chained wrists slightly upward, until she had the central link of the chain in the jaws of the electric vise. When a split second opportunity came she closed the switch which snapped the massive jaws shut. The rest would be up to her strength, to work unnoticed with her wrist muscles until she had fractured the securely held central link. Idly she watched Irma Mueller as she paced up and down.

"Yes, I think I have it," Irma said finally, pausing and considering first the Amazon and then Ethel. "You, Amazon, will be aware of the elementary fact that a projectile hurled into space into the deadline between earth and moon—that is, the exact demarcation line where earth's and moon's gravitative fields are equal—remains there, pursuing an orbit round the earth in the fashion of a small satellite?"

"Of course I'm aware of it," the Amazon shrugged, and added: "I seem to recall that as long ago as 1947 efforts were made to launch power stations into the demarcation line for experimental purposes—and failed . . . So?"

"In the hangar next my laboratory I have an old V-10 projectile, a clumsy old wreck on which I was intending to make some experiments. The war-head which formerly contained atomic force now has radio equipment so the projectile can be remote controlled. There is nothing to stop me firing it into the demarcation line where it will constantly circle the earth as a satellite."

"But how does this concern us?" Ethel asked in surprise.

"It concerns you very considerably, Miss Wilson. You and your friend here will be inside the projectile, bound. I shall not be at any pains to make your bonds immovable since once the projectile has reached the upper atmosphere there will be nothing either of you can do. You will stay in your little prison and starve or suffocate as the case may be—I care not which—watching the world you are constantly circling and can never reach again. No spaceships will go to your rescue either because under the present conditions of climatic chaos no space machines are making any trips. And of course the projectile will be too small to be seen from earth, unless anybody knows exactly what to look for."

Ethel just stared. It was plain that she could find no words with which to express the real horror she felt. What the Amazon thought of the project could not be guessed from her abstracted expression, though from her words a moment later it seemed she was resigned to her fate.

"I don't believe in arguing with anybody who has the whip hand," the Amazon said quietly. "That's your plan, Irma, and you mean to carry it out. Naturally, I shall do everything I can to stop you."

"Why can't you shoot us and be done with it?" Ethel burst out. "Why all this elaboration every time? What does it get you?"

"Extreme pleasure," Irma replied, smiling. "Shooting is far too quick and easy."

With a sudden wrench the Amazon snapped the chain link which, while she had been talking, she had been bending back and forth in the vise behind her back. Now she brought her two hands in front of her, the manacles with the loose ends of chain still on her wrists.

Irma's expression changed. Stark fear leaped into her eyes and she dived her hand into a concealed pocket of her black dress. Ethel, however, pushed her sideways and knocked her stumbling. By the time Irma had straightened again the Amazon was standing before her, smiling in the cold, deadly way which only her bitterest enemies knew.

"Well," Irma said, "why don't you kill me and get it over with?"

"First," the Amazon told her, "I have a little repayment to make, and then we'll talk business."

"Repayment? What repayment?"

"Don't tell me that you have so soon forgotten that slap across the face that you gave me?"

The blow that suddenly struck Irma across the right cheek sounded like the crack of a whip. She was flung sideways by the force of it and half stumbled against the bench, breathing hard. The Amazon gave a chuckle of amusement.

"Rather like the cat and the mouse, isn't it?" she asked. "Everything was all right while the cat was chained up—but it got loose. Eh?" And the glint in her violet eyes deepened.

"This isn't getting us anywhere!" Irma snapped, tossing the tumbled fair hair out of her eyes and rubbing her smarting face.

"I shan't hit you again," she said, "unless you give me good reason to, of course. In a while I'll take care of you properly. First, though, there are one or two orders you are going to carry out."

"Orders!" Irma screamed. "You give me orders! I'll never obey them. Never!"

"Up to you," the Amazon shrugged. "If you don't I'll break first your left arm, then your right; then I'll—"

Irma swallowed hard. "What do you want me to do?"

"First, tell me the size of your atomic bombs."

Irma stared in amazement. "The size of—? But why? They are about as big as pineapples."

"And their power? Individually, I mean."

"Each one is capable of devastating about 20 square miles of land."

"Good. I'll have two to make sure. Give orders for two atom bombs to be brought from the arsenal and placed in the hangar next to that V-10 projectile. I'll attend to them myself afterward, as far as arranging their firing mechanism is concerned."

"But what do you intend doing?" Irma demanded.

"You do as you're told and give the order!" The Amazon turned to where her instrument belt and the atom-gun lay. She strapped the belt about her waist again and pulled out the protonic gun. "Give the order, Irma, and play no tricks . . ."

Irma hesitated for a moment, then clapped her hands. Almost immediately a guard came in and saluted, standing by the main door.

"Fetch two atom bombs from the arsenal and have them placed in the main laboratory hangar—near the V-10," Irma ordered.

"Immediately, Controller . . ." And the guard turned and went out.

"Good," the Amazon murmured. "Now we'll go into your hangar—and I'm not leaving my atom-gun behind, either. Pick it up and carry it."

"Carry it!"

"Get on with it!" the Amazon said venomously.

Irma went forward and stooped, hooking her arms under the instrument. With a tremendous effort she raised it slightly from the floor and then dropped it back again. Savagely she glared up.

"How do you expect me to carry this?" she snapped. "It took three men to carry it in here!"

"Get it on your back," the Amazon ordered coldly. "And be quick about it! I'll link the chain up so it won't slip. You've got to carry it because it would hardly do for the captive to carry it, would it?"

A slow smile spread over Ethel's face as she watched Irma's unavailing efforts. Finally the Amazon handed Ethel the proton-gun, picked up the atom-gun and put it across Irma's shoulders. She staggered for a moment, then stooped forward and breathed hard as she supported the crushing load.

"Fine," the Amazon murmured, snapping the slip-chain into place. "Now let's have a look at your hangar laboratory."

Every step an effort as Irma staggered out of the laboratory, through a side door into a high-roofed hangar where among several airplanes and a space machine stood an old-fashioned V-10 on its firing ramp, the nose pointing skyward. The guard had arrived from the arsenal and with a stare of amazement at his breathless superior he indicated the two bombs lying in a felt-lined receptacle on the floor.

"Anything further, Controller?" he asked, and his eyes wandered to the massive gun on Irma's back.

"Nothing more!" Irma snapped. "Get out!"

He went promptly and closed the door. Irma stumbled a few paces further and then fell on her knees. She turned an anguished face as the weight crushed down on her back.

"Amazon, take this thing off me!"

"Why should I?" The Amazon's voice was pitiless. "You had Ethel here trying to carry similar loads in the smelting room, with a lash to reward her if she didn't. Get on your feet!"

Irma tried to rise and failed, and the Amazon reached forward her free hand, dragged her up, until she stood rocking on her feet with head and shoulders bowed forward.

"Now stay up!" the Amazon snapped. "And listen! You were generous enough to explain how you intended to dispose of Ethel and me, so it's only fair that you should know how I intend to dispose of you—and your whole bag of tricks in this sub-polar basin."

Irma passed a hand over her streaming face and stared.

"What do you intend doing?" she demanded hoarsely.

"Originally," the Amazon replied, "I had planned to blow up your entire main power plant with that gun you are carrying. Then, thanks to your neat attempt to hurl Ethel and me into space in that airplane, from which we baled out, we landed in a portion of the mountains where volcanic activity is very obvious. There are steam jets which can only mean there are vast water pressures just under the outer skin of the mountainside. To destroy your power plant with my atom-gun would involve too big a risk to myself, so I cast around in my mind for some way to free one of the buried mountain rivers—but I was nonplussed because my atom-gun won't fire that far. Your mention of a radio-controlled projectile and atom-bombs started the idea going again. If I could put atomic bombs in the projectile and guide it to the mountain range where the bombs could explode. . . ."

CHAPTER XX

THE Amazon stopped with a significant smile and Irma staggered and heaved futilely at the load forcing her down to her knees again.

"An underground river, if released, would come down into this valley," the Amazon resumed. "Once the water flooded down here it would destroy your electrical equipment and your buildings. And automatically it would free my Ultra from the negative energy beam you are projecting at it. Naturally I would take care to release the flood from a point below the Ultra. . . . I'm pretty confident that I know the area to strike."

She turned to the bombs and examined them carefully, holding in her hands enough power to blow the entire

valley off the face of the earth. Carefully she examined the complicated firing mechanism on each one.

She commented finally: "Excellent self-timing mechanism. Set the switch to the required time and they will explode when desired."

Irma reeled over to the floor, lying beside her intolerable burden and staring up at the Amazon as she replaced the bombs in the felt-lined receptacle.

"From here to that spot in the range is about seven miles," the Amazon mused. "Let us say that the projectile moves at a mile a minute to that spot—and I don't see how it could move much faster in such a limited space and with air resistance. That means seven minutes. Allow 10 minutes from the moment of the projectile's departure...."

Irma lay glaring sullenly.

"There's another thing," the Amazon said. "And maybe you'd better stand up properly for this information—"

She unfastened the chain of the atom-gun, hauling the exhausted woman roughly to her feet.

"Let me see the remote control apparatus for guiding the V-10," the Amazon ordered. "I want to know every detail."

Grudgingly, every word wrenched out by compulsion, Irma explained. She showed the Amazon the control board, the grading of the various switches, and how the power operated upon the projectile. At the end of 20 minutes the Amazon's highly-trained scientific brain had grasped every essential.

"Good," she said calmly. "I have to get all the details clear, because you won't be here to help me."

"You mean—that I am going in the projectile?"

"Yes," the Amazon replied.

"You can't do it!" Irma shouted. "You can't! At least when I planned to fire you and that girl into space I was giving you a chance to die normally—from suffocation or hunger. But you—you would send me crashing into a mountain range with two atomic bombs?"

"I do not recall," the Amazon said acidly, "that you were squeamish about your plans for attacking helpless civilians with supersonic radiations, heat waves, and atom bombs if they don't obey your bidding upon trying to wrest world power. I am merely meting out justice."

"It's too horrible, Aunt Vi!" Ethel protested. "It's inhuman!"

"Supposing it is?" the Amazon demanded, her purple eyes flaming. "I have never pretended to be human! A scientist destroyed all the humanity in me when I was a baby." The Amazon jerked her fair head. "Get in that V-10," she ordered.

Irma turned toward the projectile slowly, and climbed into the rocket's interior. The Amazon felt around for the light switch and snapped on a dim yellow glow, then with a push of her hand she sent Irma reeling against the curved metal wall.

"There's some chain on the bench, Rosy," the Amazon said briefly. "Get it."

Ethel hesitated, troubled as she always was when the Amazon was in her most vicious mood.

"Get it!" the Amazon snapped. "Stop wasting time!"

Ethel brought the chain. The Amazon considered the inside of the projectile pensively and glanced at the little portholes—so small indeed as to be little better than eyeholes. There were stanchions and brace bars in plenty and since the projectile was standing nose-upward, almost vertically, Irma looked as if she were in a semi-circular cupboard waiting for the door to be shut.

Finally the Amazon threw the longest chain around one of the side stanchions, passed it tightly around Irma's waist, and then secured it to the opposite stanchion, hooking the last link around a metal peg out of reach of her hands.

With the shorter lengths she fastened Irma's wrists behind her and bound her ankles together.

Then the Amazon went over to the atom bombs and adjusted the firing mechanism. Carefully she laid them in their felt rack at Irma's feet.

"Timed for 30 minutes hence," the Amazon explained. "That will allow an interval for any delay I might make in starting this projectile off into the air—though I can't think why there should be any trouble if all you've told me is correct."

"Do you realize what you've done?" Irma shouted. "Nothing can stop those bombs going off in 30 minutes! The mechanism cannot be reversed or changed in any way. Wherever these bombs are 30 minutes from now they'll explode! Even supposing you succeed in blowing up the mountainside and bringing a deluge into the valley, how will you escape?"

"I am a powerful swimmer," the Amazon answered calmly. "And the dis-seminator tower's summit is high above any flood water. I can take care of myself and Ethel—"

She stopped and swung round, her hand flying to the proton-gun still in Ethel's grasp. The laboratory door had opened and a guard had come in. Expecting to see Irma, he had even started to talk.

"Controller, are we to start repairs on the radio tower—"

The Amazon fired—but the guard had taken in the scene and noticed Irma in the projectile even as she yelled for help. With an astonishing leap he flung himself sideways just in time to miss the pencil of protonic fire which stabbed at him. Twisting round, he yelled through the open doorway into the corridor.

"Guards! Quick! The Amazon's free!" Then he dived—regardless of the proton-gun — straight at the Amazon. She pressed the firing button but nothing happened. The charges, fired by cheap diamonds in a minute rotary belt, had run out.

The guard fired his gun and the Amazon felt livid fire shoot the length of her arm. Overwhelmed with fury, she lashed up with her left fist, but the guard's gun came down on the back of her head and knocked her to her knees.

Ethel made a frantic grab at the guard's gun but was hurled a dozen feet across the floor and crashed into the side of an instrument stand.

Guards came rushing in, and the the Amazon got up and glared at them.

"Don't kill her!" Irma Mueller shouted from inside the projectile. "Get me out of here quick! There are two atom bombs set to explode—get these chains off!"

The head guard hurried forward and in less than three minutes he had her free. With a homicidal look on her face she swung around.

"Fasten them back to back inside here!" she ordered.

Heedless of her damaged arm, the guards pushed the Amazon into the projectile and Ethel after her. More chains were brought, with padlocks, and were fixed in position, the women being back to back, and unable to move hand or foot.

"It's a hasty job but it will hold long enough," Irma said, testing the chains. "I would have preferred reinforced chain but there isn't time to get any. We've got to get rid of these bombs right away—I'm firing you into space, Amazon, as I originally planned," she added. "Naturally I shan't fire you at the mountain range. In space the bombs will explode, harmlessly as far as we down here are concerned. All right, close the airlock."

The hinged outer side was slammed into position and the hermetically sealing sheath moved automatically into position, hissing faintly as the outer air was squeezed out.

"She means it!" Ethel panted, struggling furiously to tear her wrists and ankles free from the cutting chains. "Aunt Vi, what do we do?"

"Best we can." The Amazon set her teeth at the pain of her wounded arm. She could still feel blood trickling down it. "The only thing in our favor is that she didn't have time to use reinforced chain. I may be able to break these—Stop wriggling, can't you? You're hindering things!"

She stopped speaking and Ethel gave an anguished gasp as with a rush the projectile shot through the now opened roof of the hangar and into the night sky. Savagely the Amazon wrenched at the chains binding her wrists and strained her feet up and down with all the power of her muscles.

The effort made the links bite deep into her flesh, but she kept at the task with ruthless energy until there was a click and a weak link gave way. More wriggling with her feet cast that length of chain aside. Then she returned to the problem of her wrists. Ethel screamed presently as she felt her hands being skinned unmercifully. Then just as she felt she could no longer stand the pain there was a further click and her bruised, bleeding hands were free.

In a matter of seconds the Amazon unhooked the chain binding them together by their waists—then she went to the nearest porthole, gripping her damaged arm. It had stopped bleeding, but was nearly too stiff to move.

"We're still climbing," she said. "We're about two miles up. I can see the town below and the bulk of the mountain range."

Ethel scrambled to her side in the yellow gloom and stared. She breathed hard. The unconditioned atmosphere in the projectile was becoming smothering.

The Amazon picked up one of the bombs and placed it against the peephole. It was too large to go through the opening.

She put the bomb down and went to work to unscrew the inside frame of the peephole.

"You'd better get down," she told Ethel. "The air up here is likely to be pretty thin and deadly cold. Our air will escape and thin air will come in. It might knock you senseless if you get the full blast of it. I think I can stand it . . ."

Ethel crouched down. "But the bombs—!"

"I've got an idea. Depends on how tough the metal of this V-10 is."

With a snap the window frame opened inward, no larger than the lid on a coffee percolator. As yet the projectile had not climbed completely into the void but the air was thin. The dense, overladen atmosphere of the projectile whistled as it fled into the lesser pressure outside and the Amazon gasped painfully at the sudden tightening on her lungs. Biting cold came to jab at her fingers as she seized the edges of the small window and wrenched at them with savage strength.

Her hopes were based on the fact that, to judge from its appearance, the V-10 had considerable space travel to its credit, and, as she well knew from her own Ultra, there was nothing like space travel with its extremes of heat and cold to take the strength out of the strongest metals—and there was no reason why the V-10 should prove an exception, made of castings far below the perfect metals used in the Ultra.

As she pulled at the metal work, using all the power of her fingers, and hampered too by the injury to her arm, she felt its texture at last begin to give. Still more furiously she ripped at it, bracing her feet against the base of the inside wall. All Ethel could see, as she lay taking short breaths and feeling her heart pounding somewhere in her throat, was the Amazon's shoulder muscles bulging with effort and her features set in frozen strain.

CHAPTER XXI

PART of the metal work gave way and looked like jagged teeth against the starry backdrop. More of it crumbled and fell outward, and the Amazon picked up one of the atom bombs. The aperture was wide enough now.

"The mountain range is about three miles down," she said. "If I guess right these bombs ought to hit the valley side of it."

She thrust her arm to the limit through the hole, the bomb in her hand. Then she let it fall. As quickly as possible she did the same with the second bomb.

"Thank heaven to be rid of those anyway," Ethel muttered. "I only hope they don't destroy the Ultra."

"We have to take that chance," the Amazon told her.

"And what happens to us?" Ethel asked.

"It depends on timing," the Amazon answered, massaging her arm. "If those bombs have dropped in the right place their explosion will release an underground mountain torrent which will roll in to the valley and carry everything before it. That will automatically flood the power houses and stop the radio control guiding this projectile. Our climb will cease—since we are infinitely far yet from the demarcation line—and we'll drop back on more or less of a line with where we started. We shall not hit solid earth, but water. We shall have our fall cushioned, and with luck we may survive."

"And drown," Ethel pointed out. "The water will come through that hole you've made!"

"Only when we plunge under at the first impact. The moment the plunge has ended we'll come to the surface again. These portholes—and this gap—are set high up and should be above the water level. As we plunge down I'll block this hole with my shoulder."

They were both silent for awhile. The Amazon remained near the torn window, accommodating her breathing to the slowly dying air, listening helplessly to the gasping struggle Ethel was having to get air.

"Aunt, I can't bear this much longer," she said. "My heart's nearly bursting . . ."

"Lie flat and keep perfectly still," the Amazon told her. "It's the only way, Rosy."

Ethel obeyed, but the very effort of getting into a supine position was too much for her and she relaxed into a faint. The Amazon set her teeth and began also to feel the deadly tuggings of dying air at her more than human lungs and heart. With bitter eyes she stared at the glassy stars, those stars she had vowed one day to reach . . . How much longer? Surely 30 minutes had passed since the journey had commenced?

Then suddenly came a concussion only faintly transmitted up there by weak air—and a moment afterward another one. She angled her face to the broken peephole and was in time to see the second explosion. Regardless of the frigid breath of outer space on her face she stared in fascination.

There was a brief and bewilderingly bright effulgence of fire and a mighty ring of smoke belching outward from it—then a flame-painted mushroom sprang up from the distant mountain range. Both bombs had exploded—and still the projectile climbed so high up now as to be unaffected by any air wave agitation from the atomic blast.

The Amazon felt the air draining out of her lungs and she staggered before a wave of intense dizziness. More time passed and she fell, half choking, to her knees . . . then gradually she became aware that the thrusting sensation of the projectile's climbing had ceased.

It was losing speed, and as the seconds passed the loss in impetus became more and more marked until the V-10 seemed to be suspended in mid-stratosphere—then gradually but inevitably it began to move in the opposite direction, falling, falling, ever faster. The Amazon's eyes gleamed as she waited.

Quicker, and even quicker, dropping with the hurtling, catastrophic speed of a dropping meteor. Air returned to the cabin as the deeper depths of the atmosphere were plumbed once more and the intense cold of the upper reaches began to relax.

The Amazon breathed the air into her lungs and, revived, moved to Ethel's side and began working on her with artificial respiration until she too breathed and opened her eyes.

"The timing must have worked," the Amazon told her. "The atom bombs, I mean. The radio control has stopped and we're dropping. I only hope it is into the flooded valley."

She turned to the narrow little g and stood for a moment or two gazing below.

"Yes, we're over the valley," she said finally, "and it is flooded. I can see water from end to end—steamy wat sending up a fog blanket. Fortunately for us we didn't get high enough to fa with enough velocity to make this pr jectile red hot—even though it must fairly warm on the outside. Think y can stand this drop?" she broke quickly.

Ethel did not answer because she could not. A paralyzing sensation gri ped her stomach. Every nerve stretch to snapping point, she listened to t scream of the air round the project as it fell out of the sky.

Then came the impact. With a te rific shock the projectile struck wat and dived under amidst a hissing heated metal and exploding steam. T floor pressed up beneath the two wom and water came spouting through hole in the wall. The Amazon stagger to it and thrust her shoulder against The projectile bobbed up to the surfa again and stood swaying up and do in the surging waters.

"Safe!" Ethel breathed. "At le from that," she added. "We've still get out of this tin can—and out of t valley."

The Amazon withdrew her shoul from the gap and no more water ca in. As she had expected, the hole w above the water line and the project as unsinkable as an airtight can. Et got up and joined her. One after other they looked out on a scene t was incredibly changed.

For the most part the steam from still rising waters blotted out the vi but where it transiently cleared it vealed that some of the more mod buildings had their roofs still ab water, and the towers were standi clear of the flood; but the medie part of the town had foundered co pletely.

All lights had been extinguished only the stars cast any illumination the desolation of surging water. H and there, faint and far away, came shouting of men and women as, p sumably, they struggled to reach so place of safety—and now and again head or an arm became visible as so one swam vigorously.

"It seems," Ethel muttered, "that the innocent had to suffer for the guilty, Aunt Vi."

"How so?"

"I mean the death of all those peace-loving folks who never did any harm to anybody . . ."

"Or any good for anybody, either," the Amazon replied. "They stagnated here, Rosy—lost to the world and civilization. They will not be missed."

Ethel did not pursue the subject. Her outlook and the Amazon's were always diametrically opposed when it came to the individual rights of human beings. Instead Ethel asked a question:

"How do we get out of this thing?"

The Amazon did not reply immediately. She had switched on the small radium-luminant in her wrist compass and was studying it intently.

"The Ultra's still safe," she said thankfully. "The needle is pointing straight to it so it must be above the flood and it also means that its electricity is working again now the negative beam is cut off —Out of here?" she repeated, realizing what Ethel had said. "There's only one way, and that is for me to work on the metal of the window edge until I have made a hole wide enough for us to crawl through. When we've done that we can find a piece of driftwood or something and use it as an oar to take us to the mountain range."

She turned again to the jagged frame, seized it in both hands and began wrenching at it. Ethel did likewise but she was unable to make the slightest impression on it. Nevertheless, her added strength to the job made it all the quicker and at the end of an hour's hard work the metal, further weakened by the drop through the atmosphere and the plunge into water, had been broken away sufficiently to permit them to climb through the aperature and on to the "roof" of the projectile. Side by side they gazed around them in the steam, noticing that in the interval the modern buildings had sunken further into the flood.

"We put an end to this valley, anyway," the Amazon commented in profound satisfaction. "Every trace of the electrical equipment is utterly gone, and these waters are unlikely to subside. Or if they do the electrical equipment won't be any use. It will all need rebuilding, and that's the work of many long years."

"And even that won't be done if Irma Mueller is drowned," Ethel said.

"I give Irma credit for more sense than to let herself be drowned," the Amazon answered, "particularly as she knew what I intended doing — if I could. At the first explosion of those atom bombs I'll wager that the only thing she considered was her own safety. I'd give anything to know just where she is at this moment—"

She broke off, dropped to her knees and put out her hand in time to seize a large tree branch which came floating past. Hauling it up, she stripped off the unwanted side branches and then nodded to herself in satisfaction.

"Do nicely for an oar," she said. "Slow progress, but certain."

She laid it over the rear end of the projectile and moved it gently from side to side so that the projectile began to move forward.

"How about your arm, Aunt Vi?" Ethel asked. "Is it still hurting you?"

"Healing rapidly," the Amazon answered, with a grim smile to herself. "I'm made of tougher material than ordinary human beings, don't forget."

To satisfy herself, she used her damaged arm to operate the oar and found that the stiffness had gone from it. The amber flesh had healed over and only the rent in her sleeve remained to show where the injury had been. After a while she looked at her faintly glowing wrist-compass—then she stared at the needle incredulously.

"The Ultra's moving!" she cried. "Rising from where we left it! Look!"

"But it can't be!" Ethel exclaimed, as she stumbled along the slippery metal to the Amazon's side. But there was no doubt about it. The Ultra was definitely on the move. The needle of the compass rose slowly in its tiny vacuum-case, showing that the Ultra was rising swiftly.

"Irma Mueller!" the Amazon breathed. "That's the only explanation. Nobody else would have the scientific knowledge necessary to drive the Ultra, and who knew just where it was lying. The moment the flood came she must have been ready with a boat or something—maybe a submarine. Anyway, she reached the Ultra and now she's flying it away."

"And from the look of that needle she's heading into space!" Ethel ejaculated.

"She may only be climbing to get across the mountain range. We'll soon know. If she does go into space it will be to Venus, and since nobody knows her she might get away with it." The Amazon shook her head. "No, I don't think she'd do that—not in my Ultra. She'd be nabbed."

Ethel took a turn with the makeshift oar and propelled the projectile onward again into the seething, steamy waters as the Amazon's attention remained fixed on the compass. At last she gave a grim smile.

"The needle is horizontal now," she said, "which means she is travelling parallel to the earth's surface—and according to the needle swing she's about 40 miles away. That means she's heading for civilization—some hidden headquarters perhaps."

"And we're left in this mess," Ethel muttered. "No possible way of getting out!"

"If she looks at her aura detector she'll know that I at least am alive," the Amazon answered. "But as you say —how to get out. Even if we crossed the mountain range on foot we'd still have the Antarctic Circle to face."

"Cross the range on foot!" Ethel echoed, gasping. "We couldn't! Or at least I couldn't! Why don't you realize that an ordinary mortal has limits, Aunt Vi?"

"Sorry. I get used to thinking in terms of my own resources." The Amazon peered into the mists. "This is a problem indeed," she muttered.

She took over the job of oarsmanship from Ethel, and it was a good thing she did, for soon the projectile bobbed into the pitching cataracts produced by the thundering river rolling out of the mountains.

CHAPTER XXII

IT needed all the Amazon's strength to navigate the clumsy "boat" through the waves, and it came as an unexpected shock when they struck the rocks of the mountain side, hidden in the steam. Both women were pitched forward violently on the slippery metal. Half "beached," the projectile remained where it was as they picked themselves up.

"I think there is just one chance," the Amazon said. "This projectile has radio equipment—"

"For remote control guidance, yes," Ethel agreed, "but what is the use of that? It won't work for ordinary radio."

"Not as it is—but the components are here, and there is no reason why I can't reassemble them to make it into a radio transmitter if only for spark-gap signals which will be picked up in the outer world. As for power, that small light in the roof must run from a battery."

They went inside the projectile, and the Amazon studied the remote control radio equipment, and Ethel discovered batteries.

"Just about enough power for one good S O S," the Amazon said, after she had examined them. "Then they'll be flat. I find I can convert this radio into a spark-gap transmitter—Here, take this copper wire and two brace arms and rig up a rough aerial on the mountain side."

Ethel took the two brace arms and with them in her hands hurried outside. She found that in her interest of having some really practical thing to do to help the situation her hunger and overwhelming tiredness were to some extent forgotten.

They returned, however, when for nearly two hours she had to hang about and watch the Amazon working on the radio equipment and remodelling it. At last she finished the job and carried the affair of wires and tubes to the mountain side and connected it to the aerial. Then she brought the batteries and linked them up.

"Thank heaven this water has made the air warm, anyway," Ethel commented. "About the only thing we've got to be pleased about!"

The Amazon hardly seemed to hear her. "The thing I'm worried about is the Aurora Australis," she muttered. "I only hope its static doesn't interfere with my transmission or this attempt will be a failure. Anyway"—she connected up the batteries in series and then to the equipment—"I'll have to hope for the best. There should be just enough kick to send one message, and we'll pray that it'll be picked up."

Ethel crouched beside her, watching intently, and saw her making the final adjustments to the spark-gap plunger she had constructed. Then her finger depressed it sharply. Ethel remained tensely silent, listening to the space-morse as it was spelled out letter by letter—

"Amazon and Ethel Wilson stranded behind Mount Erebus mountain range Antarctic Circle. Ultra stolen. Arrest occupant and hold for questioning. Name, Irma Mueller. Send immediate help and use fast and strong machine. Watch for fire signal. Very urgent. Time short."

On the last word the spark, faintly visible, flickered and expired. The batteries had exhausted themselves.

"That's that," the Amazon muttered. "Now we've got to wait. If the signal is received it will be eight or nine hours before anything can happen, and in that time we must prepare a fire signal."

"And how do we light it?" Ethel asked. "That is granting we can ever find fuel."

"The batteries will somewhat recharge themselves in time," the Amazon replied. "Enough for me to make a short circuit with a couple of wires and ignite something inflammable to start a fire. Let's see what there is in the V-10."

They searched it from end to end but failed to find anything suitable in the way of fuel. Baffled, they emerged again, then as the Amazon caught sight of the heavy branch she had been using as an oar she gave a smile.

"Now why didn't I think of it before?" she muttered. "That branch hasn't been in the water long enough to be waterlogged. Only the outside is wet. I'll break it up with stones and use the driest parts. For starting the fire I can use the celluloid clamps from inside the radio set."

Ethel yawned. "Do whatever you like, Aunt. I'm going to crawl into the projectile and go to sleep. It's the only answer to a gnawing hunger and a terrible thirst. I suppose I couldn't drink any of the river water?"

"You certainly couldn't! It's volcanic in origin and may contain all manner of deadly poisons."

Ethel awoke from a troubled sleep to find her shoulder being shaken vigorously. She opened her eyes dazedly and was aware of being hauled up into the strong arms of the Amazon.

"What's happened?" she asked vaguely.

"Your father's here," the Amazon replied. "With a fast helicoflyer. He got the message."

"He did? Oh, thank heaven!"

"Dad!" Ethel gasped thankfully, as the Amazon set her on her feet in the brightly lighted control room. "It's marvellous to see you again— I thought I never would!"

She flung her arms about her father's neck as he sat in the control chair. He smiled gravely and passed a hand over her wealth of dark hair.

"Let that be a lesson to you not to inveigle me into letting you go off on an expedition again!" he said. Then glancing towards the Amazon, "Okay, Vi?"

"Okay," she responded, and slammed the airlock door.

Swiftly the machine began to rise vertically into the air. The Amazon turned to the storage locker and from it took concentrated foods and restorative bottles, setting them down on the fixture table. She motioned Ethel to them, then as she and the girl sat down the Amazon glanced across at Chris.

"Have much trouble getting here?" she asked.

"Plenty! Your message was picked up by an experimental station on the edge of the Antarctic Circle, only just audible to them even at that short distance. They relayed it to me since they had no planes with which to make a rescue. I came right away and ran smack into an attack from the Ultra."

"Where?" the Amazon asked, as he paused.

"A little north of Madagascar. Of course, from your message I knew there was an enemy aboard, but I can't understand if the message was transcribed correctly. It said 'Irma Mueller.' That couldn't be so, surely? Mueller was killed and—"

"The attacker in the Ultra was Irma Mueller, Carl Mueller's daughter," the Amazon said.

And, continuing her meal meanwhile, the Amazon related all the facts concerning the sub-polar adventure. By the time she had finished the dangerous mountains had been crossed and the helicoplane was streaking north with all the power of its triple atomic motors.

Chris said: "She must have tapped the message relayed to me from that experimental station, and knew when she saw my helicoplane heading south that I was trying to save you."

"That's about it," the Amazon agreed. "In any case she knows I'm alive by having an aura detector trained on me."

"What happens now? You've destroyed the valley and all her works, but a woman like that—if she's anything like her father—lives to fight again another day. What do you propose doing?"

"Looking for her." The Amazon set her jaw and studied the compass on her wrist. The needle was horizontal which showed that the Ultra was still airborne, and the distance the Amazon calculated to be somewhere in the region of Europe.

"I have this compass to guide me to the Ultra," she went on, "of which fact Irma cannot be aware, and therefore she must think she has escaped me. She can't cut off the secret current which makes this detector work because she does not even know it exists. Further, I have agents in every country—as indeed she has too. My agents will find out where she is, and then I'll settle the account. I won't bring her in to be dealt with by justice: her type is too dangerous for kid-glove methods. She's got to be obliterated, the same as a dangerous disease or a poisonous insect, otherwise we'll be having lots of trouble from her."

"Well, that's up to you," Chris said. "If anybody can handle it, you can. Thank heaven you wrecked the apparatus causing those storms! Many more of them and we'd have been finished."

There was silence for a while, then the Amazon glanced again at the compass on her wrist.

"Look!" she breathed—and Ethel stared at it while Chris gazed over his shoulder. The needle was rising from a horizontal to a vertical position. In perhaps three minutes it reached the maximum vertical position and remained steady.

"She's gone into space!" Ethel gasped.

The Amazon muttered: "Nobody yet knows that I am not in the Ultra—until we broadcast a warning to the contrary."

"Which we will the moment we get home," Chris put in.

"And there is no equal to the Ultra in speed. It is to Venus she is probably heading and they have no weapons capable of penetrating the Ultra's plates. Once Irma vanishes in the Hotland jungles I might never find her. I've only a tag on the vessel, not on her, whereas she has a tag on me all the time."

The complexity of the situation was more than obvious and it brought troubled silence on the trio. At the controls, Chris drove on steadily across the night-ridden wastes below.

"Do you suppose Irma may have some kind of headquarters on Venus?" Ethel asked finally, but the Amazon shook her head.

"I very much doubt it, Rosy. They would have been located by now. No, I don't think she has any connections beyond those on Earth. She's simply running for it, in the hope that she can get away from me and maybe start her activities all over again. Since there is no machine which can ever catch the Ultra, it means I can only beat her by using superscience—and I think I can, science in a range I have not yet used because there has never been urgent necessity . . . Just let me think this out," she finished peevishly, and sat back in her chair to meditate.

Ethel and Chris remained silent and the helicoplane flew on. What kind of thoughts were passing through the Amazon's highly developed brain it was impossible to guess—but evidently they were profound ones for presently she ripped a sheet from the memo pad on the control panel and began figuring rapidly in symbols and mathematics, at times muttering scientific formulae to herself.

In spite of this she gave no hint as to her intentions. She was still in an absorbed mood when the helicoplane finally landed at the London airport. And as she, Chris and Ethel stood outside the airlock she seemed to become aware that the trip was over and looked about her in the bright lights. "I think I have it. It will take me the rest of tonight to make sure. Be at my laboratory first thing in the morning."

Chris and Ethel arrived in the Amazon's laboratory at 9 o'clock the following morning. Ethel was looking brightly alert, refreshed by sleep and looking infinitely more at peace with the world now she was back in a normal civilized suit with a saucy hat to match.

Not so the Amazon. When the two entered she was still in the one-piece black suit she used for "business," and the rip in the sleeve where her arm had been injured was still there. The only thing missing was the manacle on each of her wrists. It looked as though she had spent the night working on her problem, though physically she seemed as energetic as ever.

"Oh, hello," she greeted, glancing up from the instrument bench. "Morning already, eh?"

"For heaven's sake, Aunt Vi, don't you ever rest?" Ethel asked.

"Why should I? Time enough to rest when I'm dead—and that won't be for about 500 years in the normal run of things. Besides, I'm not tired . . . I've worked out my problem. I've also satisfied myself that Irma is heading for Venus. She'll be there in about three more days and nights. She's not getting the maximum speed out of the Ultra, perhaps because she isn't quite sure how to handle it."

"And you still think you can get there ahead of her?" Chris asked, puzzled.

"I know I can." The Amazon motioned to a complicated radio-like equipment standing in the centre of the laboratory floor, which had never been there before. "That's why!" she said. "I've been building it during the night. At this moment a similar equipment is being made on Venus by the scientific engineers at space headquarters. The plan is dangerous, and I'd have preferred a lot more time in which to experiment. However, that can't be. You are aware that for the past year I have been working on 'electronic transportation,' using the laws of physics."

"Yes" Chris agreed, "only I could never figure out what you were driving at."

"My experiments mean this: We can transmit sound in its original form over any distance—even from planet to planet—via radio. We can do the same with pictures in color, again by radio waves, and call it television. Right?"

"Of course—electronic processes," Chris agreed.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE Amazon said: "I simply propose to elaborate the idea to transmit solids, either organic or inorganic. In other words, break the object down into its electronic pattern at the transmitting end—just as in radio the sound is broken down into electronic impulses and then transmitted, to be reassembled at the receiving end in the original form."

Chris looked at Ethel and the girl looked back at him. A look of wonder broke suddenly over Ethel's face.

"You don't mean that you're going to broadcast yourself to Venus?" she cried.

"In a sense, yes," the Amazon assented. "I've been working for a long time to overcome the timelag involved in crossing space in a ship. Electronic transportation means travel at the speed of light—186,000 miles a second, so fast that the Ultra will be standing still by comparison. I can get from here to Venus in about seven or eight minutes, depending on her exact distance from us, which, of course, varies a good deal."

"It's—unbelievable!" Chris gasped. "Suppose you don't get reassembled properly, though? Say, an arm where a leg should be? A hand where there should be a foot— Great heavens, Vi, you might finish up as a terrible monstrosity!"

"I might—but I don't think I shall. That is the risk—and why I would have liked more time—"

"But what about your mind?" Ethel interrupted. "What happens to your thinking apparatus when you're dissembled?"

"What happens to a radio set when you take it to pieces?" the Amazon asked. "It just doesn't function until you put it together again. So it must be with a brain, I imagine. However, I have spoken over the short wave to the chief physicist of Venus and he is constructing an identical apparatus to this one of mine, following out my instructions to the minutest detail. Any moment now he'll get in touch with me to tell me it is completed. When that's done I'm sending a monkey from one of my experimental cages to see what happens."

Chris said: "If this experiment works properly, Vi, we have a secret of ultra-rapid space transit—or in any fact any transit—which will make a space machine obsolete!"

"Hardly obsolete," the Amazon said. "Some people will still prefer the space liners, just as in the old days some preferred a sea liner to an airplane. The Space Line won't suffer—but we'll have an adjunct to it, and a highly paying one, especially for freight. That though is in the future. Right now it's Irma I want . . . Oh, one other thing!"

Chris and Ethel looked at her expectantly.

"In making this transit and breaking myself down into an electronic pattern I can also alter my aura frequency by one degree!" The Amazon smiled coldly. "That means that when I reassemble at the receiving end Irma will no longer be able to find me with the aura detector. One degree is sufficient to upset all her calculations because the detector won't register. She will probably think me dead . . . Excuse me."

Somewhat overpowered by the superscience the Amazon was displaying, Chris and Ethel watched her go to the shortwave teleradio as it buzzed for attention. On the screen the color picture of the Venusian chief physicist appeared, and his voice was clear even though coming across nearly 80,000,000 miles of space.

"Everything is completed to your specifications, Miss Brant," he announced.

"Let me see your color graphs," she instructed.

He nodded and the scene in the teleplate changed. Microphotographs of the finished machine were revealed, embodying the machine's internal and external workings. The Amazon pondered deeply over each one and at last spoke.

"Perfect! Exactly right! You know exactly how to operate it?"

"There is no chance of an error," the scientist assured her, reappearing on the screen. "What do you propose doing?"

"In three minutes I am sending a monkey. Let me know if it reassembles detail for detail, for whatever defects there may be. I'll show him to you and you can photograph him for later comparison."

Ethel went to a cage and brought the monkey, which she held in front of the television transmitter. There was a pause.

"Right," the chief physicist said. "We have his picture. I'll report the moment anything happens."

The Amazon switched off and with the monkey still cradled in her arms she walked across to the gridded platform directly in the focus of the complicated radio apparatus. Carefully she put the monkey down, motioned Ethel to hand over a hypodermic syringe from the bench, the needle of which she sank into the little creature's arm.

His playfulness immediately began to subside and within 10 seconds he lay on his side and relapsed into unconsciousness.

"Only way to keep him still," the Amazon said, moving to the switchboard. "A human would understand to remain immovable, but you can't tell that to a monkey."

Fascinated, Chris and Ethel looked on. The Amazon plunged home a massive knife-switch and the power dynamos hummed. Giant horseshoe magnets at either side of the queer radio equipment glowed with a lambent bluish fire, and though nothing was visible in the area between the magnets there was a sense of strain and stress emanating from them, an odd feeling as if space itself were being warped beneath inconceivably powerful forces.

And, gradually, incredibly, the monkey was becoming misty. His outer skin became momentarily transparent and it looked as if his skeleton were lying there, then this, too, vanished and the transmitting plate was empty.

"Within that area between the two magnets," the Amazon said, "the electronic patterns of the monkey are gathered inside a cocoon of force, so not a single electron can escape. All of it is now transmitted—thus."

She closed another switch. The magnets died and instead huge transformers with diagonally-shaped tubes on their summits throbbed with power. Nothing could be seen, but the Amazon watched the twitching of dial needles and controlled her switches by consulting them. Finally she switched off and smiled, tossed the tumbled blonde hair from her eyes.

"Now it's up to Venus," she said. "The electronic composition of that monkey is at this moment hurtling with the speed of light across the gap, the speed of light being, of course the limit for all radiant energy."

She seated herself, and for a moment there was a suggestion of tiredness on her perfect features, but it passed almost immediately. Through the long interval which followed, neither Chris nor Ethel spoke. They were too anxious to discover what had happened, for one thing, and for another they were still somewhat dazed by the wizardry of which this fantastic girl was capable.

Then came the buzz of the teleradio equipment. Instantly the Amazon switched on.

"It worked, Miss Brant—it worked!" the chief physicist exulted. "Here he is! He reassembled perfectly. First the skeleton, then the muscles and sinews, and finally the whole body. He's still doped but he'll be all right."

Chris, Ethel, and the Amazon stared at the screen, at the unconscious monkey in the physicist's arms. There was no doubt about it. The experiment to transmit organic matter over a vast distance was an accomplished fact.

"Good!" cried the Amazon. "That being settled, I'm coming next—in about an hour. I'll radio to you before I start. Repeat the performance exactly, and to the split second."

"Rely on it," the physicist promised, and switched off.

The Amazon turned from the apparatus and smiled. "That gives me just time for a bath, a meal, and a change," she said. "Then I'll be on my way. Naturally you'll stay to see what happens?"

"Stay!" Chris echoed. "Earthquakes wouldn't move us!"

"Then I'll join you later."

The Amazon left the laboratory, returning in about half an hour in a new black suit, a fresh instrument belt about her waist, and her yellow hair combed and drawn into position over the crown of her head. Apparently she had taken a drink of restorative for the bright glow of incredible health was back in her eyes and cheeks.

"Ready?" Chris inquired, as he and Ethel strolled over from surveying the endless equipment.

"Almost half an hour to go yet. I have the machinery to set to my exact pattern."

The Amazon turned to the apparatus and busied herself with the weird mathematical devices which controlled the electronic paths. She said no word, reserving her whole concentration for her task. One slip in her calculations, as she knew better than anybody, might mean all the difference between perfect reassembly and a monstrosity which could never be righted. In fact this thought clouded her mind once or twice but she resolutely thrust it on one side, knowing it was a chance she had to take if Irma Mueller was to be found and defeated.

So finally her preparations were complete and she glanced up at the electric clock to discover the time was almost up. She switched on the teleradio and waited while the wave hurtled across space to Venus, and came back again with the chief physicist's face on the teleplate.

"I leave in exactly three minutes," the Amazon told him. "Set your time to synchronize with mine. It's—10.27."

"Right," the chief physicist responded. "Everything is in order."

The Amazon switched off and turned to Chris and Ethel.

"Best of luck, Vi," Chris muttered. "You've done a few things in your time but this is the most brain-raising of the lot. How shall we know if you've been successful?"

"I'll radio to you the moment I've reassembled. I'll succeed, all right—never fear."

"By, Aunt Vi," Ethel murmured. "Once you are reassembled I know there's nobody more capable of dealing with Irma Mueller."

Without emotion, which she rarely showed, the Amazon walked into the area of the electromagnets and set a switch, then she walked back to the centre of the transmission grating.

"Leave everything exactly as it is," she instructed. "It's all operated by time switches so you will have nothing to do—ah! It's beginning to work!"

To the Amazon, the scene in the laboratory, as the second hand of the clock pointed exactly to 10.30, became hazy and unreal and she had the illusion that she could see through it. At the same moment came a curious conviction of floating and yet, paradoxically, of being fastened down. Then a whirling in her head and a mighty roaring—even a moment of unbearable anguish as it felt as though every atom in her being were wrenched apart. She clenched her hands the better to steady herself against the torture—then the whole universe seemed to blank into total darkness.

CHAPTER XXIV

HOW long this dreamless unconsciousness lasted the Amazon had no idea. It was an unconsciousness far deeper than that created by any anaesthetic; it was something approaching death itself in its absolute cessation of every sensation and thought. Then gradually sounds formed in the abyss and crept out of it, the measured clink of instruments and the snapping of switches. Cold and brilliant light suddenly split the darkness and the Amazon found herself staring at massive electromagnets and the faces of white-garbed scientists gazing at her in triumph.

"Miss Brant, you did it! It worked!"

"You have reassembled—atom for atom!"

"Heartiest congratulations!"

The Amazon stared at them fixedly and she saw their faces alter expression as they glanced at one another. They seemed startled, puzzled. There was something here they evidently could not understand. Though in every detail the Golden Amazon was still the Golden Amazon, even to the instrument belt about her waist, there was something lacking in her expression—a deadness, a lack of fire in her usually brightly intelligent eyes.

"Is anything the matter?" asked the chief physicist in concern, seizing her arm. "Miss Brant! Why do you stare at us like this" Don't you realize what you've done? You've crossed 75,000,000 miles of space electronically!"

"Have—I?" The Amazon rubbed her forehead bemusedly. "When? Why? What's happened?" she demanded in sudden fierceness, staring about her. "How do I come to be here?"

"How?" the chief physicist echoed. "But, Miss Brant—"

"You mean—" The Amazon hesitated and made an effort. "You mean that I am Miss Brant? But you can't mean that I—"

She stopped and walked listlessly from the reception grating to a chair, sank down on it and buried her blonde head in her hands.

"This is appalling," whispered the under-physicist in his superior's ear. "We must have made a terrible mistake somewhere."

The chief physicist shook his head. "We didn't make any mistake. This is the outcome of a hair's-breadth flaw in calculation which Miss Brant herself has made—or even a slight bodily fault may be responsible. The fact remains that she has amnesia and hasn't the least idea who she is or her reason for being here."

The Amazon glanced up at last and studied the troubled faces around her. "Do you all have to stare at me as though I'm a curio?" she demanded. "Wouldn't it be more to the point to explain things to me? Where is this laboratory situated? Where are we?"

"Venus," the chief physicist answered quietly. "You projected yourself from earth electronically for one purpose only—to trap Irma Mueller when she comes to this planet in your Ultra."

"Names—names!" the Amazon muttered, getting up and thrusting a hand through her thick hair. Meaningless names! Irma Mueller? Who is she?"

"The answer to all this, Miss Brant, is that your memory has gone," the chief physicist said bitterly. "Perhaps if you rest awhile your mind may adjust itself. What is the last thing you remember?"

The Amazon considered him with puzzled eyes. "I don't really remember anything. It seems that life began for me when I found myself here."

"She's even forgotten everything she ever knew about science," whispered the under-physicist. "This gets worse, sir!"

"And yet I am able to talk in comprehensible language," the Amazon mused, frowning over the fact. "That means that I must have learned somewhere. I can't always—have lived like this. I have existed and done things before—somewhere."

"Certainly, both here and on your home world of Earth—"

"You say this is Venus. Then I have crossed space. How?"

The buzzing of the teleradio made the chief physicist turn. The face of Chris Wilson appeared on the screen.

"What about Miss Brant?" he asked anxiously, and Ethel's face was mirrored behind him.

"She's here, Mr. Wilson—safe enough," the chief physicist replied gravely.

"Thank heaven! Let me speak to her."

The Amazon was disregarding the conversation and instead gazing puzzledly about her. The chief physicist glanced at her.

"Mr. Wilson to speak to you, Miss Brant," he said, motioning to the instrument, and she turned.

"Mr. Wilson? Do I know him?"

The chief physicist turned back to the instrument.

"A dreadful thing has happened, sir," he said, obviously trying hard to keep his emotion in check. "The electronic transition has caused Miss Brant to lose her memory. She is not even able to remember who she is, let alone the reason for being here."

"What!" Chris shouted, and behind him Ethel's hand went to her lips in horror. "But—that's terrible! She's got to remember! She— Let me speak to her. Quickly! Maybe my familiar voice will help her."

"Or mine," Ethel added urgently. "She might respond to me quicker than anybody. I understand her best. Put her on."

The chief physicist turned and took the Amazon's arm. Without resisting she submitted to being led to the instrument and looked inquiringly at Ethel's troubled face mirrored on the teleplate.

"Aunt Vi!" Ethel spoke sharply. "It's I— Ethel. You must remember me? Rosy Cheeks? Remember?"

For 30 seconds the Amazon seemed to be trying to concentrate. Then with a helpless shrug she turned aside and went to the chair again to sit down and rub her forehead. The chief physicist spoke quickly into the instrument.

"We'll do what we can for her," he said. "We'll rush her to a private room in the psychiatric hospital and see if we can restore her memory by routine methods. I'll call you again."

The physicist motioned to one of his assistants and gave him instructions. The man nodded, took hold of the Amazon gently and indicated the door. Without a word she went with him.

"The moment the Ultra is sighted," the physicist said to another assistant, "this woman Irma Mueller is to be followed and arrested when the machine lands. No use attacking it, because it's invulnerable. It should make its appearance any time now. Relay those orders to headquarters, then try to get in touch with Commander and Mrs. Kerrigan. They are old friends of Miss Brant's and controllers of this end of the space line. They might be able to help her—"

"No use, sir," the assistant interrupted. "Commander and Mrs. Kerrigan are away from home—on holiday somewhere and out of touch. We'll have to rely on hospital methods to bring Miss Brant round."

The chief physicist said: "I'll go to the hospital right now and see if I can help."

For two hours, the most brilliant psychiatrists in the Earthmen staff of the Venusian hospital and the chief physicist did what they could to restore memory to the blank-faced, golden-skinned beauty half lying in an armchair in a private room—but it was useless. To all the scientific apparatus and endless questions she failed to respond. Finally she relaxed and closed her eyes wearily.

The chief physicist looked at the psychiatrist anxiously—then both men and their assistants glanced round as an attendant came in. "Message for you, sir," he murmured to the chief physicist. "It has just been reported from the airmen detailed to watch for the Ultra that it landed 15 minutes ago about three miles north of here, in the Hotlands jungle."

"And the woman—Irma Mueller?" the scientist asked sharply.

"She got away. By the time the airmen had found a spot to land and reach the Ultra the woman had gone."

"She's got to be found!" the chief physicist snapped. "Use every available man to look for her. She's wanted by the authorities."

The man nodded and went out. Then the chief physicist turned to the Amazon again, shook her gently out of the half doze into which she had fallen.

"Miss Brant, there is something I must ask you."

He took a tuogsten two-shilling piece out of his pocket and put it in her palm.

"Will you please bend that?" he requested.

"Bend it?" The Amazon stared at him. "Why?"

"Just try to bend it!" he insisted. "With one hand. Two fingers behind and one in front of the coin. It's a favorite trick of yours."

The Amazon fingered the coin clumsily, dropped it, and it was restored to her. Failing to accomplish anything with one hand, she tried both, and failed again. At last she handed the coin back.

"Please leave me alone," she pleaded. "I'm weary of these silly experiments and requests. Go away and leave me!"

The physicist hesitated and then nodded soberly, moved his head to his companions and they filed out into the corridor and locked the door.

The Amazon finally got up from the chair and began pacing up and down, striving hard to bring the blurred edges of her consciousness into sharp focus. She felt, she knew, that she was on the very edge of understanding the riddle of her situation, but for all her efforts she could not quite overcome the infinitesimal something which held her back from completeness.

Finally she went to the window. It was glassless, as were all windows skirting the torrid Hotlands of Venus with its 135 deg. F. in the shade. And it was night—720 hours of it. Mist swirled past from the dense jungles, mist which vanished when it reached the window and swam into the range of the automatic dispersers.

Ten minutes later a figure came out of the mists outside and advanced to the window, peering into the room. Gray eyes brightened in the woman's good-looking face as she saw the figure on the bed, and, her senses dulled, the Amazon failed to hear Irma Mueller slide over the window ledge and move softly into the room.

"I congratulate you, Amazon," she said softly, pulling her gun out—then she went over to the Amazon and unbuckled her belt quickly, tossing it on one side. "That must have been a wonderful scientific feat—crossing space by electronic transit. I have dabbled with the idea myself and I could never make anything of it. Pity it had to put an end to you being a superwoman."

The Amazon stirred on the bed and sat up as the voice reached her. She stared at Irma Mueller and at the levelled gun in her hand.

"Who are you?" she whispered.

"Irma Mueller—your bitterest foe! We've been fighting a battle of scientific wits ever since we met in my headquarters in Melrose Valley, which headquarters you succeeded in destroying. I owe you plenty for that, Amazon!"

The Amazon shook her head. "I don't understand you."

"I'm aware of that. . . ." Irma sat down on the bed edge and gazed at the Amazon's vague expression. "You're a fallen idol, Amazon. You attempted too much! But let me tell you how I have found you— The short wave communication which Wilson sent from Earth, when he talked with that scientist on Venus here, was picked up by me. From it I learned that you had lost your memory and been taken to a hospital. I though you must be dead because your aura does not register on my detector. . . . Lucky the radio in your Ultra is permanently switched on to pick up stray messages, isn't it?"

Irma's eyes were glowing brightly. With triumph in her voice she went on: "I came to Venus to establish fresh headquarters in the Hotland jungles, with the help of some of the Chameleon Venusians who are still hostile to people of Earth—that is, your sort. The moment I knew you were still alive the paramount thing was to find you and destroy you!"

The Amazon stared fixedly and said nothing.

"You know what happened to cause your present condition, don't you?" Irma snapped.

"No," the Amazon muttered. "I don't."

"Then, since I am a scientist, I'll tell you what I think is the right answer. You altered your frequency—your bodily aura. You must have, because when you landed on Venus there was no reaction from the aura compass. Altering your frequency makes you incomplete! You can't dabble with the natural aura of a body and expect it to behave flawlessly. In your case the defect has resulted in amnesia."

The Amazon was silent. Irma got up from the bed and played with the gun in her hand. Then suddenly she whipped up her left hand and struck the Amazon across the face. It knocked the Amazon from the bed and on to the floor. She crouched there, rubbing her cheek and staring up at the icily smiling Irma, who said:

"That's the first time I've ever seen a blow knock you off your feet! Don't tell me you're getting flabby as well!"

The Amazon got to her feet and her right hand struck Irma in sharp retaliation. But it was only a flick compared to the force the Amazon usually used. Irma blinked in amazement.

"I don't know who you are but you're not going to hit me like that without getting it back!" the Amazon said angrily.

"It's incredible," Irma exclaimed. "Your memory gone, and your strength too! How I wish you were normal so you might know why I'm killing you. Because I'm going to—like this. . . ."

She fired her electric gun as she spoke, and the Amazon, more by luck than judgment, twisted half out of the line of fire. The savage electric voltage sent a violent thrill through her shoulder, neck and head as it struck the top of her right arm. The electrical kick—for it was an antique weapon compared to her own proton-gun—was nonetheless powerful enough to fling her violently on her face.

But something else had happened too. Irma did not fire again immediately, not sure whether she had killed her enemy or not. As for the Amazon, there were buzzers screaming in her head, an agony of atomic shifts and motions—and then a jolting pain in her skull which subsided abruptly. But the picture she had for so long been trying to focus became crystal clear. Of course! Now she knew!

She was the Golden Amazon, superwoman, who had suffered temporary amnesia. The strongest woman in the human race and with her sworn enemy right behind her. Her bodily aura had been deficient by one degree, and the electric charge from Irma's gun had restored it in the voltage shock she had received.

She did not immediately move position. To do so, she knew, might be fatal. At last Irma moved forward to look at the motionless body. She stooped and turned the Amazon over on her back, studying the burned shoulder. The Amazon could feel the searing burn, but was satisfied it was not enough to interfere with her actions. It was the opposite arm to that which had been previously injured.

With the speed of a flashing light it moved, the fist driving straight up under Irma's chin. She toppled back, her gun dropping.

Immediately the Amazon was on her feet, and rained blow after blow on the gasping Irma. Finally she picked her up and flung her across the bed, to crash on the floor beyond it. In one dive the Amazon catapulted on top of her.

There was hammering on the door, followed by the rattle of a key in the lock. The psychiatrist and physicist with their assistants came hurrying in.

They pulled the Amazon away from the groaning, battered Irma as she too was dragged to her feet.

"Does this mean—?" the physicist asked, and the Amazon cut him short.

"That I've recovered? Yes! What did you have to interrupt me for? This woman is my special prize!"

"No, Amazon, that's jungle law," the physicist answered, as Irma squirmed and writhed helplessly in the grip of the men. "She must go to trial. You've done your part."

The Amazon hesitated and then relaxed. "Well—all right, if you say so. The job's finished as far as I'm concerned. And let me go!" she snapped, yanking her arms free from the grip which held her.

"You want that shoulder patched up," the psychiatrist commented.

"I agree," the Amazon nodded. "Just one more thing, then you can call the doctor."

She dived so swiftly the men could hardly follow her movement. It was a rush which took her halfway across the room, and her right fist shot up as she moved. It was a frightful blow with all her strength at the back of it. It snapped Irma's head back sharply. She was torn from the grip of the two men holding her and flung clean through the open window. From outside came a dull thud as her body hit the ground.

The Amazon relaxed and gave a grim smile as she turned.

"Sorry, gentlemen, but I like to finish the things I start—in my own way."

She waited until two of the assistants had jumped through the window to haul in Irma's limp body. The psychiatrist examined her briefly and looked up.

"Dead," he said. "Her neck's broken."

The Amazon nodded. "That's the way to finish off most snakes, isn't it? Now, perhaps you'll have somebody attend to my shoulder, then I must find my Ultra and return to Earth. I have my Martian colonization plan to complete."

THE END

Woman Doctor

by Anne Lorraine



Dr. Lynne Thorn had devoted her life to her work and at twenty-seven held an important post on the staff of an East End clinic. While on holiday, she met her childhood friend, Jimmie Mathers, who had become a famous dance band leader. They fell in love, and Jimmie asked Lynne to marry him and give up her career.

Don't miss this dramatic romance of a woman who found her heart's desire—and found that Love could play unexpected tricks.

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